

ADJECTIVES
AND OTHER WORDS

ERNEST WEEKLEY



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ADJECTIVES—AND OTHER WORDS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

WORDS ANCIENT AND MODERN
MORE WORDS ANCIENT AND
MODERN

THE ROMANCE OF WORDS

THE ROMANCE OF NAMES

SURNAMES

AN ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIONARY
OF MODERN ENGLISH

A CONCISE ETYMOLOGICAL DIC-
TIONARY OF MODERN ENGLISH

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ADJECTIVES— AND OTHER WORDS

BY ERNEST WEEKLEY, M.A.

‘Indocti discant, et ament meminisse periti’
(C. J. F. HÉNAULT)

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

'There is a peculiar tedium, a special kind of boredom which seems inseparable from books on words.'

LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH.

PREFACE

THIS volume is something of an olla podrida. Chapter I is a paper lately read to the Nottingham Three Arts Club, and Chapter XII is prodigiously lengthened from a wireless 'talk' given a few years ago. The remaining chapters have already appeared in various periodicals, the editors of which are hereby cordially thanked for permission to reproduce them. All have been revised and corrected, some slightly pruned and others considerably extended. Chapters II and XI, the latter with many additions, are from the *Atlantic Monthly*. Chapter III is combined from an article in the *Quarterly Review* and a shorter notice in the *Observer*. Chapter X is also from the *Quarterly*. Chapters IV, VII, and X are reprinted from the *Cornhill Magazine*, and Chapter V from the *Youth's Companion* (Boston, U.S.A.). Chapter VI appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* and Chapter IX in *Discovery*.

The periodicals for which these articles were written range from the popular to the technical, so that the mode of treatment varies considerably. Chapter V may seem to some readers as childish as its subject. Chapter VIII is undeniably stodgy, but, as most of the material for it was collected by one of my pupils, I can say without arrogance that it is a valuable contribution to the history of the English language.

As the book, as a whole, deals rather with the history of words than with etymology in the stricter sense, derivations are not usually included. To have given the Greek originals of *all* the scientific words mentioned in Chapter XII would have involved making the unreadable still more unreadable. The origin of such words is generally obvious to those who are familiar with Greek, and can easily be ascertained, by those who are not, in any decent dictionary. My practice, in earlier books, of printing Greek words in the Greek character has earned me a stern rebuke from a youthful reader. If he should come across this volume, he will see that I have bowed to his authority in the matter of transliteration.

ERNEST WEEKLEY.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, NOTTINGHAM,
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CHAPTER I

ADJECTIVES

It was some time in November 1928 that the Speaker of the House of Commons remarked, 'Much of my time is spent in striking out adjectives.' He alluded to the wording of those questions which Members of the House propose to address to Ministers, questions which, before revision, are apt to be adorned with such intensifying epithets as *grotesque* and *ridiculous*, regarded as unparliamentary, and, at that time, not yet introduced into the 'comity of nations'¹ by a representative of the British Empire.

The adjective, defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* as 'a word standing for the name of an attribute, which, being added to the name of a thing, describes the thing more fully and definitely,' is perhaps our least essential part of speech. It is, as its name suggests, something 'thrown at' an object. Its Greek name, *epithet*, implies something 'stuck on.' It is often either meaningless or superfluous, as in the 'learned counsel,' 'gallant officer,' 'reverend gentleman,' etc., occasionally has a flavour of insincerity, e.g. 'your sweet little daughter, dear husband, wonderful old aunt,' and may even become illogical, as when one of the chosen of democracy

¹ For this phrase see p. 187.

delivers himself of the statement, 'The honourable gentleman is a damned liar.'

Like other more or less useless things the adjective is freely used as packing material. When some years ago a demented lady made an attempt on the life of Signor Mussolini, the President of the Irish Free State was impelled to congratulate that remarkable man on his 'providential escape' from an 'odious attack,' and to send his 'earnest wishes' for a 'speedy recovery' from the 'infamous attempt' which had caused 'utmost indignation,' etc. In fact, there are people who seem to think that a noun unaccompanied by an adjective has no real signification. So far does this go, that the epithet sometimes actually swallows up the object it is supposed to describe, and we get such current expressions as 'haven't the foggiest' and 'not an earthly,' 'a dip in the briny,' and 'six months' hard.' It will be remembered that Mr. Dick Swiveller was addicted to imbibing 'the rosy' (in his case gin and water) and showing his agility in 'the mazy.'

It is perhaps to this instinct for adorning every object that we owe the so frequent use of an adjective which, formerly barred in polite society, is now a stock rhetorical device in the works of our best-sellers. In Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*, probably forgotten now, but well worth resurrecting, Lord Jocelyn, exploring the East End, questions a passing workman as to the object of a new building.—'The man replied that he did not know the object of the building, and, to make it quite manifest that he really did not know, he put

an adjective before the word "object," and another, that is, the same, before the word "building." The history of this 'adjective,' which Besant, like a gentle Victorian, leaves to the reader's imagination, will be found, with some curious examples of its use, in my *Words Ancient and Modern* (p. 16). Here I will only remark that it has no connection with 'by Our Lady,' and that I never heard it more effectively used than by a large and beery 'four-wheeler,' exhorting a taciturn and unconvinced 'hansom' outside Hampstead Heath station in the year 1890. All I caught in passing was, 'An' where d'yer s'pose they got their bloody money from? Why, robbed it aht o' the bloody people'; but I submit that the Marxian theory of wealth has never been more ably or more succinctly summarized. It is put, so to speak, in a nutshell.¹

In the days when journalism was remunerated at the rate of a penny a line, it obviously paid better to say that a murderer was 'launched into eternity'² than simply to record the fact that he was 'hanged.' For padding there is no word like the adjective, and the longer the adjective the better. It is to the penny-a-liner's attendance at funerals that we owe the 'melancholy cortège' and the 'sacred edifice,'

¹ There are many legends of triumphs in minute calligraphy. Engraving the ten commandments on a threepenny-piece is an exercise that might appeal to the American gentleman who for some years has been rolling a pea-nut up a mountain with his nose. The 'nutshell' figure dates from Pliny, who tells us of a copy of the Iliad which was thus contained.

² I should like to know who coined this cliché. It occurs (1765) in a letter written to George Selwyn by Gilly Williams, who attributes it to 'old Rowe.' Who was 'old Rowe'?

while his observation of the local weather has supplied us with 'a storm of unprecedented violence accompanied by a torrential downpour.' It is to be supposed that all these, and many others, are kept permanently set up in the office.

It is a matter of common observation that the toiler's hand is usually *horny*, the arm of coincidence *long*, and the stranger who is unable to direct you *perfect*. At one time the aristocrat was inevitably *bloated*, but economic pressure has now transferred the description to the plutocrat. Some of our stock epithets have a more literary ancestry. Death has been *grim* since Shakespeare, though his powers of 'holding on' do not seem to have been noticed before the 19th century. It has been difficult to use the word *lucre* (though quite unnecessary to use it at all) without association with *filthy* since Tyndale adopted this rendering of *aischron kerdos* (*Titus* i. 11) and *durance* (equally unnecessary) has always been *vile* since Burns wrote, 'In *durance* vile here must I wake and sleep.' Since the quite respectable word *menial* fell into disrepute, it has become usual to attach to it the adjective *pampered*. This is a contribution from an otherwise unremembered poet, one Thomas Moss (†1808), who, in *The Beggar's Petition*, wrote, 'A liveried servant drove me from the door,' but, at the suggestion of Goldsmith, made the emendation which has passed into the language.

The result of man's unconsidered indulgence in adjectives is that words belonging to this part of

speech have a Protean character altogether foreign to the rest of our vocabulary. As familiarity breeds contempt, so epithets constantly and unreflectingly used fade and lose their force, change their meanings in the most fantastic manner, and need constant replacement by others less effete. *Naughty*, i.e. worthless, as in Jeremiah's 'very naughty figs' (xxiv. 2), is now banished to the nursery, so that Gloucester's 'naughty lady,' addressed to Regan (*Lear*, iii. 7), seems strangely mild. The 'naughty book' against which the Dean of Durham, preaching at St. Paul's Cross on June 22, 1561, warned his hearers, was a theological treatise! When Shylock rebukes Antonio's custodian with the words:

' I do wonder,
Thou naughty gaoler, that thou art so fond
To come abroad with him at his request '
(*Merch. of Ven.*, iii. 3),

he illustrates not only the older and stronger sense of *naughty*, but also the original meaning of *fond*, foolish, as still in 'fond hopes.' French says, 'être fou (or assoté) de quelqu'un,' and, when we 'dote' upon anyone, we are behaving like 'dotards.' 'Fond of' has weakened in sense, so we now say 'crazy about,' using an adjective that once meant crushed, damaged (Fr. *écrasé*), and gradually assumed the sense of rickety in structure or mind. *Rickety* itself is a medical term, derived from *rickets*, a Dorset dialect name for rachitis, i.e. spinal inflammation. So the discussion of one adjective leads to another, like chain cigarette-smoking.

Perhaps no adjective has so bewildering a history

as *nice*. Although the great Duke of Wellington looked on war as a calamity, he described the Battle of Waterloo to old Creevey as 'a d——d nice thing.' This is rather disconcerting, till we read the further comment, 'the closest run thing you ever saw.' We still speak of 'nice distinctions' or of judging 'to a nicety.' When Wycherley characterizes the hero of his *Plain Dealer* (1674) as 'of an honest, surly, nice humour,' what does he mean? I know not. It is difficult to say how the word acquired the meaning which it generally has now. It is an Old French adjective meaning foolish, the sense which it had at first in English. The *Oxford Dictionary* treats it under fifteen sections and Shakespeare apparently uses it in ten meanings or groups of meanings. The interpretation of 16th- and 17th-century examples is often only to be conjectured from the context, which is perhaps the reason why it is not found in the *Authorized Version*.¹ By the 18th century *nice* had become generally complimentary, and the 19th adopted it as an inclusive term of approval for all that appeals to 'nice people.' 'Not quite nice' expresses, in the mouths of the old-fashioned, a rather strong condemnation, and a lady who once felt it her duty to communicate to me various unedifying details as to the goings-on of another lady, dropped her voice at the finish to murmur in awe-struck accents, 'In fact, some of them go so far as to say right out that she is not a nice woman.'

¹ An analysis of that magnificent repertory of English would show a marked absence of idle and superfluous epithets.

The difficulty of interpreting Shakespearean epithets may be illustrated by the two adjectives *sullen* and *surly*, wrongly explained by most commentators and glossarists. Both have degenerated since Shakespeare's time. *Sullen* is the popular form of *solemn*,¹ of which it has assumed the gloomier sense, though the words are often used indifferently. With 'customary suits of solemn black' (*Hamlet*, i. 2) we may compare 'put on sullen black incontinent' (*Richard II*, v. 6). *Surly*, explained in Schmidt's *Shakespeare Lexicon* as 'gloomy, dismal, gloomily morose, sullen, crabbed,' really meant haughty, imperious, in Shakespeare's time. Its original form was *sir-ly* (cf. *lordly*, *kingly*, etc.). When Katherine says to Petruchio, 'Tis like you'll prove a jolly surly groom,' she is not alluding to a morose temper, but to arbitrary and dictatorial ways. The famous lines (*Sonnet 71*) in which the two adjectives in question occur together—

' No longer mourn for me, when I am dead,
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world '—

¹ Its Middle English form was *solein* ; cf. *sudden*, for Middle English *sodein*. The complete history of the word will be found in a paper I contributed to the Transactions of the Philological Society about twenty years ago. The evidence of the Latin-English dictionaries of the 16th and 17th centuries is conclusive as to *solemn*, *solein*, and *sullen* being variant forms of the same word. Gradually *solemn* took one set of senses and *sullen* another. This is a common phenomenon with 'doublets,' e.g. *gentle* and *jaunty* have now nothing in common, but both represent Fr. *gentil*. So great became the divergence of sense between *solemn* and *sullen* that they could actually be used as

express inexorable solemnity rather than dismal gloom. The degeneration in sense of *surly* suggests that we do not like to be told what to do, while the history of *forbidding* reflects our equally strong dislike of being told what not to do.

It is not often that an adjective rises in the world, but this has happened to *sturdy*. It is now suggestive of vigorous physique and a healthy independence of character ; but in Elizabethan times incorrigible rogues and vagabonds were described as 'sturdy and valiant beggars,' the second adjective having its etymological sense of able-bodied, while *sturdy* meant something like defiant, reckless. It comes from Old French *estourdi*, stunned, bewildered, intoxicated (now *étourdi*, thoughtless, giddy). By Cotgrave's time (1611) the French word had acquired a variety of senses, none complimentary, and some apparently incompatible—'*estourdi* : dulled, amazed, astonished, dizzie-headed, or whose head seems very much troubled ; hence also, heedlesse, inconsiderate, unadvised, witlesse, uncircumspect, rash, retchlesse or carelesse ; and sottish, blockish, lumpish, lusk-like, without life, metall, spirit ; also malled, felled, or knocked downe.' The unmerited promotion of *artless* is due to our national conviction that cleverness is to be distrusted. In the 16th century Nashe uses the word correctly when he writes of 'the artless tongue of a tedious dolt,' but the sentimental 18th century established

opposites, e.g. 'Our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change' (*Romeo and Juliet*, iv. 5) might be rewritten 'Our festal hymns to solemn dirges change.'

the 'artless maid' as its ideal heroine, at the same time relegating *artificial*, i.e. skilfully constructed, to the class of uncomplimentary epithets.

Another adjective that has made its way is *pretty*, which by the 15th century had become a term of general approbation. In Anglo-Saxon it meant crafty, cunning. So also *cute* has come to mean attractive in colloquial American; in fact, it is about equivalent to *dinky*, which also appears to be an Americanism, though possibly starting from the Scottish *dink*—

'My lady's dink, my lady's drest,
The flower and fancy o' the West.'

(Burns)

The mention of *dinky*, which seems to have supplanted the short-lived *divvy* (I suppose for *divine*), suggests a reflection on what we owe to our young people. So far as my observation goes, the male of the species, as soon as he becomes self-conscious, inclines to meiosis. His highest praise is expressed by 'not so bad' or 'fairly decent,' his condemnation by 'pretty poor.' The female, on the contrary, revels in hyperbole. I know one young lady who, scorning the *ripping* and *rotten* of an earlier age, knows nothing intermediate between *divine* and *revolting*. It is perhaps to the quest for new intensives by the immature mind that the Protean character of the adjective is partly due. *Putrid* and *ghastly* have their day, get worn too smooth by constant use and are replaced by 'simply chronic,' whatever that may mean. *Hectic* is properly used of the symptoms of consumption and other wasting diseases, but in a

recent review I read, 'As a fighting pilot he had terrific adventures and his convivialities in the intervals were almost as hectic.' A few years ago *terse* was a favourite approving epithet, and, in one of Mr. P. G. Wodehouse's inimitable stories, the bishop, saved from a furious dog by the dexterity with which the curate plants a 'rock' in the animal's short ribs, describes the exploit as the *smoothest* thing he ever saw. One is inclined to believe that this same love of juggling with adjectives has prevailed through the ages and has had much to do with the semantics of our tongue. How else are we to explain the fact that *quaint*, which comes ultimately from Latin *cognitus*, known, familiar, is now commonly applied to what is rather unusual?

The tendency to use the exaggerated epithet is well illustrated by the history of *smart*, an adjective which, applied in the 19th century to the kitchen-maid in her Sunday best, came upstairs about 1885 as the description of a social class whose antics fill a certain type of newspaper, the people sometimes described as 'really posh' and 'awfully swish.' It supplies an interesting parallel to such laudatory epithets as *ripping* and *spanking*. Related to the verb to *smart*, it originally meant painful, stinging—'How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!' (*Hamlet*, iii. 1). Fairly early in its history, the sense of stinging passed into that of vigorous, alert, capable, efficient, still the prevailing sense in America. It is not till the beginning of the 18th century that we find it applied to dress. The *Oxford Dictionary* has a very interesting quota-

tion dated 1716—‘Nothing would please His Worship but smart shoes, smart hats, and smart cravats. The truth is he had been brought up with the groom and transplanted the stable dialect into the dressing-room.’

As a contrast to this importation from the stable-yard let us consider the most overworked adjective of to-day, one of which Mr. Fowler writes, ‘What is the strange charm that makes this wicked word irresistible to the British journalist?’ You will have guessed that I mean *meticulous*. Introduced into English by the 17th-century Latinizers, it had a brief currency in its proper sense of timorous, easily alarmed. Sir Thomas Browne says that the ‘ticking’ of the death-watch beetle communicates ‘just cause of terrour unto melancholy and meticulous heads’ (*Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, ii. 7). Then it disappeared, to be revived in our own day and to become an obsession with those writers who feel that such nouns as ‘care,’ ‘attention,’ ‘accuracy,’ etc., have no meaning unless accompanied by this superfluous epithet. Probably some writer of distinction introduced the word, but, so far as I know, he remains unidentified. In some cases, however, we can trace the misuse of an epithet to the real culprit. The accepted, but incorrect, use of *internecine* in the sense of mutually destructive dates from an error in Johnson (p. 36). *Bluff*, defined by Johnson as ‘surly,¹ blustering,’ owes its current sense to the picture called up by Scott’s ‘bluff King Hal’ (*Marmion*, vi. 38).

¹ I.e. imperious, domineering. See p. 7.

Sometimes the dialects have supplied us with adjectives ¹ which quickly become so indispensable that we cannot realize how we ever did without them. Carlyle endowed us with the Scottish *feckless* (i.e. 'effectless') and Scott rescued the dialect *stalwart*, not found in literature between the 16th century and *Marmion*. Quite recently *smarmy* has become the only possible word to describe an oily and ingratiating manner. It comes from an old verb *smalm*, to anoint. Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith speaks somewhere of a rustic damsel 'smarming' her hair. This, rather illogically, suggests *barmy*, lately introduced from northern dialect, and properly meaning effervescent. It is found in early Scottish literature, and Scott uses 'barmy-brained' in *St. Ronan's Well*.

This supply of historic and vigorous English will soon dry up, permanently quenched by 'education' and the B.B.C. Every Midlander ² knows that a *nesh* child is apt to be *mardy*. To *mar* is to spoil, a spoilt child is *marred*, an epithet which, by association with *naughty*, *greedy*, etc., naturally becomes *mardy*. Even the *Oxford Dictionary* ignores the word. *Nesh*, on the other hand, has a literary history extending from Alfred the Great almost to the present day and is still used all over the country. Its prevailing modern sense is tender, susceptible to cold, or what the contemporary schoolgirl calls

¹ Also, of course, with other words. We feel inclined to pity the inarticulateness of our fathers, who knew not *swank* or *wangle*.

² This was addressed to a Nottingham audience.

'soppy,' but it was once more dignified—'A nesshe answer brekith wrathe; an hard woorde rereth woodnesse'¹ (Wyclif, *Prov.* xv. 1), and might very well be revived.

While *neshe* has a continuous history from the 9th century to the 20th, the excellent adjective *gradely* seems to have disappeared from literature about the year 1400, though it lived on vigorously in oral tradition. Charlotte Brontë uses it, in inverted commas, in a letter written in 1851, and it is familiar to every north-countryman. On September 13, 1929, the Minister for Mines described the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Convalescent Home at Blackpool as a 'real gradely place.' Another adjective which forms a fitting pendant to *gradely* is *jannock*, with which Mr. Lloyd George intrigued many of his hearers and readers on October 25, 1922. This admirable epithet, meaning something like 'fair and square,' is in use all over England. Its varying forms show a fine indifference to vowel sounds: we find *jannock*, *jinnick*, *jonnock* (also *jannocks*, etc.). It is one of the unexpectedly numerous dialect words admitted by Johnson. In some regions it is applied to a flat loaf, and it is probably a derivative of Old Norse *jamn*, even. Mr. Lloyd George's use of the word let loose a correspondence in those papers which extend their hospitality to the nightmare delusions of the amateur philologist. One correspondent stated that *jannock* perpetuated the memory of one J. N. Oak, famed for his righteous dealing, while a certain

¹ Madness.

C. Rickett, whose standard of rectitude was equally rigid, was responsible for the figurative sense of *cricket*!

It is possible to detect in some of the tendencies illustrated by adjective-history certain characteristics of the human race, mostly connected with original sin! Spiritual elevation is apt to be regarded as due either to feebleness of mind or to hypocrisy. *Silly*, like its German cognate *selig*, corresponds to the Latin *beatus*, blessed. Its modern sense is due to its regular collocation with *innocent*, a term still applied, in many dialects, to the village idiot. *Ninny* is related to *innocent* as Ned to Edward. *Sanctimonious* is now the natural epithet for a humbug, but Prospero cautions Ferdinand to restrain his amorous ardour till—

‘ All sanctimonious ceremonies may
With full and holy rite be minister’d.’
(*Tempest*, iv. 1)

So apt are we to distrust appearances, that *demure* has altogether changed for the worse since Milton wrote in *Il Penseroso*—

‘ Come, pensive nun, devout and pure,
Sober, steadfast and demure.’

Another almost synonymous adjective has had an even more curious history. Unless we knew that *sad* originally meant sedate we might be puzzled by John Paston’s criticism of his betrothed—‘ She ys no thyng so sadde as I wold she wer.’

Dislike of conspicuous virtue has given a new sense to *parsimonious*, formerly the natural description of a good housewife, and contempt for wisdom adequately expressed has ruined the once complimentary *sententious*. The *sententious* man is now often regarded as *pompous*, another victim of the same instinct. *Egregious*, i.e. of outstanding excellence, perhaps owes its downfall to ironic use. *Obsequious* once meant no more than dutifully obedient, and *officious* is defined in Phillips's *World of Words* (1678) as 'ready to do good offices, serviceable, friendly, very courteous and obliging.' An 'essay on man' is contained in the sense-development of the word *suggestive*, which, according to a small American dictionary I have just acquired, means 'designed or tending to arouse improper thoughts ; offensive to modesty and delicacy.'

Already, in connection with *artless*, I have touched on the deeply rooted Anglo-Saxon distrust of knowledge or expert skill. None of our stock national sarcasms is more crushing than 'Think you know a lot, don't you?' *Cunning* occurs repeatedly in the *Authorized Version* as an approving description of good craftsmanship. *Crafty*, i.e. skilled, began to degenerate in Middle English. *Artful*, now almost inseparable from a 'Dodger,' has descended as *artless* has risen. In Milton it still means what it ought to mean—

'Thyrsis, whose artful strains have oft delay'd
The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,
And sweeten'd every musk-rose of the dale,
How cam'st thou here, good swain?'

(*Comus*, 494)

If an adjective of this class is susceptible of two meanings, the worse usually prevails. This has happened to *sly*, which had in Middle English the general sense of 'cute.' Wyclif uses it to render the Latin *prudens*—'Therfor be ye sligh as serpentis and symple as dowves' (*St. Matthew*, x. 16). *Knowing* has gone the same way. It is perhaps out of deference to the clearly expressed feeling of our race that the man who is afflicted with knowledge is apologetically described by the French name *savant*.

According to Tacitus, 'Omne ignotum pro magnifico' expresses the attitude of uncultured man, but this dictum would remain equally true if 'malefico' were substituted. Mankind instinctively distrusts what is *strange*. The original Latin meaning of *insolent* was 'unusual,' but it passed into Old French and Middle English with the sense it now has, though the Renaissance Latinizers tried hard to restore its dignity, e.g. Puttenham, in his *Art of English Poesy*, tells us, 'For ditty and amorous ode, I find Sir Walter Raleigh's vein most lofty, insolent and passionate.' *Uncouth* (with its dialect variant *unkid*) is Anglo-Saxon for 'unknown,' and our insular attitude appears in the meaning we give to *outlandish*, i.e. foreign. On the other hand, what belongs to our own *kind* is naturally regarded as beneficent. Native excellence is suggested by 'kindly Scot,' 'the kindly fruits of the earth,' while the prevailing sense of the adjective *kind* springs from that of gently born. It is thus a parallel to *generous*, which still has its etymological sense of nobly descended, when we speak of 'generous old

port.' The *kin* which is at the root of *kind* is etymologically identical with the *gen-us* which has given *generous*.

The human instinct for making new adjectives and the way in which posterity shows approval of such formations may be illustrated by the history of the word *fine*. The Romans had plenty of commendatory adjectives, but they felt the lack of an epithet to express the idea of what is finished and perfect ; so, from the verb *finire*, to finish, they made a new adjective *finus*. It is not recorded, but we know that it must have existed, as its descendant forms are found not only in all the Romance languages and in English, but also in Dutch, German, and Scandinavian. Evidently it was an adjective badly needed by Europe. The *Oxford Dictionary* finds it used in about twenty senses or groups of senses. A 'fine point' implies minuteness and a 'fine woman' suggests the massive, but that is how familiar adjectives behave, especially in English. The imported *fine* took over some of the senses of the native *fair*, one of the most interesting and characteristic words in our language, to which it is now peculiar ; for, though its cognates are found in the older Teutonic languages, they have disappeared from their modern descendants. When applied to persons, the essential meaning of *fair* is beautiful, almost exclusively in reference to women, the 'fair sex.' Things that are *fair* are free from blemish, as in a 'fair copy,' or distinctly favourable, as in a 'fair wind,' though too constant use has watered

down the sense to moderate, e.g., in a schoolboy's report, *fair* is rather faint praise. Actions that are *fair* have the quality of justice, as in 'fair play,' which, like most effective phrases, is first found in Shakespeare ; cf. a 'fair field and no favour.' Its general opposite is *foul*, as in 'foul play' and 'by fair means or foul.' Finally it is applied to the hair and complexion. 'Fair hair' originally meant beautiful hair. Harold Harfagar, i.e. Fairhair, King of Norway, also called Pulchricomus by the chroniclers, was of course named from his abundant locks, not from a colour that he would share with more than 90 per cent. of his fellow-countrymen. The change of meaning in this particular connection is due to the fact that our ancestors admired the 'Nordic' colouring and regarded a dark complexion as 'foul.' Thus, even centuries ago, it was true that gentlemen prefer blondes.

CHAPTER II

ON DICTIONARIES

‘WHAT do you think he means by “zip”?’ ‘I don’t know,’ said Mr. Wartle; ‘let’s look it up in the dictionary.’

This scrap of dialogue, from the late W. L. George’s *Caliban*, arrested my attention, as illustrating what are perhaps the two most characteristic things about dictionaries—their supposed omniscience and their ubiquity. There is something touching in Mr. Wartle’s childlike confidence that the dictionary, like photography, cannot lie. He does not express a wish to consult the *Oxford Dictionary*, or the *Century Dictionary*, or the latest edition of *Webster*, in which he might reasonably expect to find the history and meaning of a word traced with erudition and competence. ‘The dictionary’ is good enough for him, and what the dictionary says, goes. It is true that even the great Dr. Johnson defined the word *pastern* as ‘the knee of an horse,’ an anatomical inexactitude which would produce on an ostler the kind of paralytic shock that a sailor might experience on finding in the same famous work *leeward* and *windward* both described in identical terms as ‘towards the wind.’ *Cricket* must have changed considerably if, in the Doctor’s day, it was really ‘A sport, at which

the contenders drive a ball with sticks in opposition to each other.' But, fortunately for lexicographers, those who consult the dictionary are not usually critical. In fact, almost the only individual to approach the sacred book in the spirit of a doubter is the lexicographer himself, who knows by the sad experience of his own misdoings how easily a mistaken explanation, an incorrect form, or even a non-existent word may be handed down from one compiler to another.

Look up in any of the widely used dictionaries which claim to give etymologies the word *syllabus*, and you will find it derived from the Greek *sullambanein*, to take together. This sounds a reasonable explanation, and *syllabus* is now a word we should be sorry to lose, but it is really a ghost and has no more to do with the aforesaid Greek word than with *syllabub*. It is simply a mistake in early printed editions of Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* for *sittubas*, the accusative plural of the Greek *sittuba*, a parchment contents-label attached to a manuscript. So much for omniscience. It may be concluded that the earnest inquirer into words would be well advised to believe only what he finds in the *Oxford Dictionary*—and not always that.

As to the ubiquity of the dictionary there can be no question. Within the memory of the oldest now alive there have been few houses—at least of those possessing any books at all—whose library has not included an out-of-date Barclay, an obsolete abridgment of Johnson, an early Webster, or some equally useful misleader of the mind that thirsts for informa-

tion. It was not always thus, for 'the dictionary,' as we understand the word, is a comparatively modern element in life. *Dictionarium* is not a classical Latin word, any more than *lexicon* is classical Greek. To the medieval scholar a 'dictionary' was a collection of 'dictions' or phrases, put together for the use of pupils studying Latin. We find *dictionary* first used in this sense in the 13th century by an Englishman, John Garland, and *dictionarium* in the 14th; but the first work published in England under the English title 'Dictionary' was the famous Latin-English Dictionary of Sir Thomas Elyot, which appeared in 1538, the year before Robert Estienne, of the greatest of all dictionary-making dynasties, published his *Dictionnaire François-Latin*. The word *lexicon*—the neuter of the Greek adjective *lexicos*, 'relating to words'—dates in its accepted current sense from the Renaissance only.

The earliest lexicographical efforts were probably made by Roman students of the Greek language and culture. We are told that Cato learned Greek at eighty, a task which he would hardly have tackled without realizing the importance of tabulating his newly acquired vocabulary. Teachers naturally compiled lists of words and phrases for the use of their pupils, and such vocabularies would be copied and attain some circulation; but it is obvious that what we call a dictionary was made possible only by the invention of printing.

If we restrict our attention to England, we find that all our early glossaries explain the vernacular

by Latin, or what in the Middle Ages passed for Latin. Such vocabularies were, in fact, compiled to help grammar-school boys to acquire a knowledge of the only general means of communication possessed by the learned. Although, as we have seen, the words *dictionary* and *dictionary* occur, most compilers use more fanciful titles, such as the *Ortus Vocabulorum*, the 'garden of words'; the *Promptorium Parvulorum*, the 'storehouse of the little clerks,' of which many editions were afterwards printed by Wynkyn de Worde; and the *Catholicon Anglicum*, the 'English universal remedy.'

These are perhaps the most comprehensive, but we have a host of smaller compilations. In all of them the order, instead of being alphabetical, is usually classificatory—that is, the words are arranged in parts of speech, or, more frequently, under such headings as kitchen implements, garments, diseases, musical instruments, birds, animals, and so on. Later on, when in the 16th and 17th centuries Latin-English dictionaries aiming at some completeness become numerous, we still find sub-sections devoted to such headings as herbs, trees, precious stones, names of hawks, names of hounds, and so forth, and in the earliest the medieval arrangement of the English before the Latin is usually preserved. The practice of giving fanciful names to dictionaries did not die out until well into the 18th century. A favourite title, both in England and abroad, was *gazo-phylacium*, that is, treasure-house, or more commonly, *thesaurus*—a name still borne by well-known publications. Florio's famous Italian-English Dic-

tionary of 1598 was called a *Worlde of Wordes*, a title adopted later by Phillips for his large English Dictionary (1678). *Glossographia* is another description used by 17th-century lexicographers.

The dictionary-makers of the Middle Ages aimed at teaching Latin and would have been amused at any suggestion that their own native English was worthy of attention. But the introduction of printing, the spread of learning, the diffusion of a noble literature, and closer contact with foreign influences had such an effect on the language that it became a subject not only worthy of study, but also involving difficulties and obscurities which cried aloud for elucidation. As Mr. John Drinkwater has lately written, 'The English language was, to cultured Elizabethans, like a new-found and wonderful inheritance. And they revelled in it, they sported with it in every conceivable way.' And so the dictionary came into existence, like other novelties, to supply a long-felt want.

Its beginnings were modest. Until the 18th century no lexicographer aimed at completeness. His object was to explain the more difficult words in the language. Nowadays every dictionary contains, no doubt inevitably, nineteen twentieths or perhaps ninety-nine hundredths of unnecessary matter. Who, for instance, wants to know that a *dog* is a 'well-known domestic quadruped,' that *twenty* is 'twice ten,' that a *bell* is 'a hollow body of cast metal, formed to ring, or emit a clear musical sound, by the sonorous vibration of its entire cir-

cumference, when struck by a clapper, hammer, or other appliance' ? The last of these definitions, as will be guessed from its explicit clarity, is from the great *Oxford Dictionary*, which also tells us that to *kiss* is ' to press or touch with the lips (at the same time compressing and then separating them), in token of affection or greeting, or as an act of reverence '—a piece of erudition usually acquired by the youngest and least experienced without lexicographical help. Probably not a hundredth part of the dictionary is ever used by any individual reader ; but, as the compiler cannot expect everyone to need the same fraction of his work, he is obliged to put in everything, and even to cater for the eager student who is uncertain whether a dog may not be a centipede.

The first in date of our English lexicographers is Dr. John Bullokar, who published in 1616 *An English Expositour teaching the Interpretation of the hardest Words used in our Language, with sundry Explications, Descriptions and Discourses*. The eighth edition (1688) of this tiny book, now lying before me, is enriched with ' a new and copious Supply of words,' ' an Index directing to the hard Words by prefixing the common Words before them in an Alphabetical Order,' and ' a brief Nomenclator, containing the names of the most renowned Persons among the Ancients, whether Gods or Goddesses (so reputed), Heroes, or Inventors of profitable Arts, Sciences, and Faculties. With divers memorable Things out of ancient History, Poetry, Philosophy, and Geography.' Although the format, even

of this enlarged edition, is such as to fit easily into a waistcoat pocket, it is described as an 'Expositour or Compleat Dictionary,' and it has the characteristics which distinguish the lexicographical attempts of the 17th and 18th centuries, namely, the conception of a dictionary as a sort of encyclopaedia, insistence on the fullness of its vocabulary, and an evident leaning towards that Latinized jargon which for a time threatened to submerge plain English. A benevolent preface ends with the comforting words, 'Live long, industrious Reader, advance in Knowledge and be happy.'

Next to Bullokar, in fact, in the following year (1617), comes one of the most extraordinary works in the history of lexicography, Minsheu's *Ductor in Linguas* or *Guide into the Tongues*, a full dictionary, explanatory and etymological, of the English language, with meanings in ten other languages. This is the first English etymological dictionary and also the first English work to appear with a list of subscribers. Minsheu was an impecunious teacher of languages and, in Ben Jonson's opinion, a rogue. He compiled his great work with the assistance of a 'company of certain schollers and strangers at mine owne charge,' with whom he made descents on Oxford and Cambridge to collect material and enlist subscribers. We can imagine that his 'strangers' were rather a tatterdemalion, hungry-looking crew, and we have his own statement that the task of supporting them had involved him in 'great debtes, impossible for me ever to pay.' I should like to know more about Minsheu. He seems

to have led an adventurous life abroad, wandering for long years from land to land in his eager quest for linguistic knowledge. He may have been a rogue, but he was certainly an enthusiast, and one is glad to know that his monumental work reached a second edition, though I doubt whether he or his benevolent backers of the Inns of Court ever reaped much pecuniary advantage from it. The polyglot character of his work was no doubt due to the example of Ambrosio Calepino, or, as he was usually called by the learned, Calepinus, whose Latin Dictionary, first published at the beginning of the 16th century, was elaborated in successive editions into a polyglot dictionary of nine—and later of eleven—languages, its most ambitious development appearing a few years before Minsheu's. This lexicographer had the unusual experience of becoming a word himself. In 17th-century French the verb *calepiner* meant to interpret words, and *calepin* is still used of a memorandum book or vademecum.

I have lingered over Minsheu because he was no mere lexicographer, but a devoted word-hunter. His great folio is still consulted by serious philologists and, though many of his etymologies are comic, he often anticipates the conclusions of the most erudite modern research. I may instance his derivation of *dismal* from Latin *dies mali*, unpropitious days, derided by Trench, but now known to be substantially correct, and his intelligent conjecture that the much-discussed word *yeoman* 'seemeth to be one word made by contraction of

yong man,' an etymology quite recently revived—July 1921—by the *Oxford Dictionary*.

But Minsheu does not belong to the series of explanatory English dictionaries compiled for the use of the not very literate public of the age. The real successor to Bullokar is Cockeram, whose *English Dictionarie or Interpreter of hard English words* (1623) proposed to assist 'the more speedy Attaining of an Elegant Perfection of the English Tongue' by 'Ladies and Gentlewomen, young Schollers, Clarkes, Merchantes, as also Strangers of any Nation.' For a long time successive editions of Bullokar's and Cockeram's diminutive volumes ran neck-and-neck in competition for public favour, like the more ponderous productions of Webster and Worcester in the United States during the 19th century.

A more interesting work is a *Glossographia* or 'Dictionary interpreting all such hard words whether Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, Teutonic, Belgick, British or Saxon, as are now used in our refined Tongue. . . . Very useful for all such as desire to understand what they read,' by T. B., that is, Thomas Blount, of the Inner Temple. This very valuable little glossary, 'chiefly intended for the more-knowing Women and less-knowing Men,' gives a very good idea of the way in which 17th-century English was being flooded with foreign and learned neologisms, so that even the author himself was, as he says, 'often gravelled in English books.' Significant of the change taking place in the vocabulary is the author's statement that

he has 'in a great measure shun'd the old Saxon words, as finding them growing every day more obsolete than ever.' The age is approaching when Dr. Johnson will define *network* as 'any thing reticulated or decussated at equal distances with interstices between the intersections,' a *cough* as 'a convulsion of the lungs, vellicated by some sharp serosity,' and will modify his hasty statement that Buckingham's comedy, *The Rehearsal*, had not 'wit enough to keep it sweet,' with the corrected version, 'It has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction.' It may be noted that Blount is our first authority for the sense we now give to *classic* and *classical* and also for the ghost-word *syllabus* (p. 20).

Blount was followed by Milton's nephew, Edward Phillips, whose *New World of Words* or *A General English Dictionary* (1678) is on a much larger scale than those of his predecessors and is sometimes regarded as the first English dictionary in the modern sense. I note, however, that while it elucidates the *dog-days*, it still refrains from telling us what a *dog* is, though Blount, who accused Phillips of plundering his own work, reproaches him with his 'needless explication of many trivial words.' Phillips's book was re-edited many times by John Kersey, an industrious lexicographer, who seems to have turned out dictionaries in the 18th century as untiringly as did Noah Webster in the 19th. In the seventh edition (1720) I find to my great solace and comfort the entry *dog*, 'a well-known creature,' a somewhat meagre definition, improved into 'a

quadruped well-known ' by Nathaniel Bailey, whose dictionary, first published in octavo (1721), ran through a very large number of editions and became the standard authority until superseded by Johnson.

In 1730 Bailey published his large folio edition, which omits all proper names, mythology, and so on, and is the first example of a complete dictionary as we understand the word. Bailey, like many dictionary-makers, was a schoolmaster. At the end of the preface we find : ' N.B. Youth boarded and taught the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew Languages, Writing, Accounts, and other parts of School Learning, in a Method more easy and expeditious than is common ; by the Author, at his House in Stepney, near the Church.' It was an interleaved folio Bailey that was used by Johnson as the basis of his own great work.

I have mentioned only a select few of the numerous dictionaries published between Bullokar and Johnson. I have most of them within reach as I write, and, as I turn from one to the other, I observe that the dictionary-making animal has certain unvarying peculiarities. He is as irritable as a poet and as full of his own importance as a film-star. He accuses his predecessors of incompetency and his contemporaries and successors of plagiarism. Blount points out derisively that Phillips, in his account of *rosemary*, says nothing of ' the singular use of it in adorning a piece of roast beef,' which hardly seems to us a very serious omission. Elisha Coles, who published in 1676 a small dictionary which sold freely for more than half a century, rejects all

previous performances as either 'too little or too big.' The author of a *Glossographia Anglicana Nova*, which appeared in 1707, sums up all three of these lexicographers as follows :

Blunt [i.e. Blount] went a-simpling in a Field twenty Years without discovering many new Plants, which had been pardonable in him, had he given us the true Names, and not been mistaken in the Description, Vertues and Qualities of several of the old. Phillips to whose laudable industry we owe a much more bulky Performance was no better qualified for paving a way to any one of the Sciences, having neither Skill, Tools, nor Materials: so that Cole, after all, with his few Pretences has as much real worth as any of the former, and may make good the part of a Guide to Tradesmen and illiterate Readers.

This very superior gentleman apparently aspires to higher flights than his predecessors, who, far from claiming to instruct the learned, persistently emphasize the fact that they cater for the class intermediate between the educated man and the illiterate peasant, a class defined on one title-page as consisting of 'Young Scholars, Tradesmen, Artificers and the female Sex,' on another as 'Ladies who have a turn for Reading and Gentlemen of no learned Profession.'

Naturally each lexicographer proclaims his own wares to be superior to all others. This leads to the title-page gradually expanding into a kind of pamphlet, which combines an encyclopaedic summary of polite learning with something like a museum catalogue. Occasionally the serene consciousness of absolute superiority makes the elaborate title-page unnecessary. In 1753 a small dictionary was published anonymously by John Wesley. Admirers of that great and good man will note with-

out surprise that his comparatively modest title-page ends with : ' N.B. The Author assures you he thinks this is the best English Dictionary in the world.'

That lexicographers should copy from one another is inevitable. Many a ghost-word due to a 17th-century misprint still gibbers at us from the more ambitious dictionaries of the 18th and 19th centuries. Sometimes, even—as in the case of *syllabus*—the ghost has acquired flesh and bones and become a respectable citizen of the world of words. In 1761 Daniel Fenning published his *Royal English Dictionary*, inscribed to George III. His dedication may be called John Bull-ish. ' Proud of the honour of being an Englishman,' he points out that—

The French, though now spoken in all the Courts of Europe, cannot lay claim either to the conciseness, purity or strength of expression to be found in the English ; its softness may suit the disposition of those who are born slaves, but it is neither suitable to the free and manly sentiments of English Kings or English Subjects.

Fenning's is quite a good dictionary, but it accidentally omits the word *uncle*, an omission still unrectified in my ' improved third edition ' of 1768. A close examination of the numerous English dictionaries published during the latter part of the century would show that some of the compilers carried their admiring trust in Fenning so far as to imitate his reticence with regard to the word *uncle*.

Johnson's dictionary marks an entirely new departure. It is the work of a literary man, not of

‘ a harmless drudge ’—his own definition of a lexicographer. It is selective in vocabulary and is the first dictionary in which the meanings of words are illustrated by literary quotations. It is also full of personality. We know that Johnson was of the opinion that the first Whig was the Devil, and accordingly we find the word *Whig* contemptuously dismissed as ‘ the name of a faction,’ while a *Tory* is described as ‘ one who adheres to the ancient constitution of the State and the apostolical hierarchy of the Church of England.’ His gibe at the Scots in his definition of the word *oats* as ‘ a grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people,’ was well answered by a Scot with, ‘ And where will you find such horses or such men ? ’ There must have been a good deal of Boythornian summer-lightning in the Doctor’s vigorously expressed dislike for the Scots. Boswell slyly observes that five out of the six assistants who worked with the Doctor on the Dictionary were of Scottish origin, which suggests that Johnson, whatever his prejudices, knew a good thing when he saw one. Nor need we take much more seriously ‘ the implacable hatred of all things American,’ on which Mr. Mencken dwells.

The Doctor’s recorded opinion that *patriotism* is ‘ the last refuge of a scoundrel ’ did not get into the Dictionary, though it defines a *pension* as ‘ an allowance made to anyone without an equivalent ; in England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country.’ Still stronger was his projected note to

renegado. 'You know, Sir,' said he to Boswell, 'Lord Gower forsook the old Jacobite interest. When I came to the word *renegado*, after telling that it meant one who deserts to the enemy, a revolter, I added, "Sometimes we say, a Gower." Thus it went to the press: but the printer had more wit than I and struck it out.'

The most famous of all his definitions is perhaps *excise*, 'a hateful tax levied upon commodities, and adjudged not by the common judges of property, but wretches hired by those to whom excise is paid,' which—leaving out the 'commodities'—would represent with some correctness what the downtrodden English bourgeois of to-day is beginning to feel about the income-tax. One would give a good deal to have Dr. Johnson's definition of a Bolshevist.

When his friend Adams pointed out that the forty French Academicians had taken forty years to accomplish what Johnson proposed to do by himself in three, the Doctor answered, 'Let me see; forty times forty is sixteen hundred. As three to sixteen hundred, so is the proportion of an Englishman to a Frenchman'—another Boythorn outburst which only a pedant would censure.

Like most interesting people, Johnson was an unexpected and rather volcanic mixture. A lady, who simperingly congratulated him on the omission of all indecent words from the Dictionary, was met with the truly Johnsonian retort, 'So you have been looking for them, Madam?'

But it is not only the anecdotic side of his Dictionary that appeals to the student of English. The

17th century had what we now know to be a completely mistaken conception of language. Men of learning and the educated classes in general had come to believe that the language of their time had reached an ideal perfection, like that of classical Latin, and only required a little pruning and purifying at the hands of the lexicographer in order to become permanent and unchanging. This fantastic delusion first appears in Italy, where the Accademia della Crusca—that is, of the bran—took upon itself to ‘sift’ the language and publish the accepted residue in its *Vocabolario* (1612). I am told that the State subvention for the production of successive editions of this remarkable work has only just been withdrawn under the Fascist régime. I have already mentioned the forty French Academicians who, according to Howell, ‘used to meet every Monday to refine and garble [that is, to sift] the French language of all pedantic and old words, as also of some superfluous consonants, and put such another dictionary to light as Crusca in Italy,’ and who, in doing the letter *A*, remembered the word *Académie* only in time to slip it in at the last moment.

We now know that the duty of the lexicographer is to record and not to criticize, that refined speech and elegant speech are the delusions of a mistaken optimism, and that the only people who now speak English with any approach to historical correctness are the few surviving agricultural labourers who are old enough to have escaped the devastating effects of the Elementary Education Act. Johnson’s Dictionary went far to accomplish, in the 18th

century, what the Italian and French Academies had unsuccessfully attempted in the 17th. It is, of course, as hopeless for the lexicographer to try to stem the flowing tide of new words and expressions as it was for Mrs. Partington to keep out the Atlantic with a mop, but Johnson's authority was so unparalleled that Boswell's description of him as 'the man who had conferred stability on the language of his country' had, for some time at any rate, an element of truth.

Johnson himself was too wise to cherish the illusion of stability. In his Preface, so well worth reading, but so little read nowadays, he writes :

'Those who have been persuaded to think well of my design, require that it should fix our language, and put a stop to those alterations which time and chance have hitherto been suffered to make in it without opposition. With this consequence I will confess I flattered myself for a while ; but now begin to fear that I have indulged expectation which neither reason nor experience can justify. When we see men grow old and die at a certain time one after another, from century to century, we laugh at the elixir that promises to prolong life to a thousand years ; and with equal justice may the lexicographer be derided, who being able to produce no example of a nation that has preserved their words and phrases from mutability, shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language, and secure it from corruption and decay, that it is in his power to change sublunary nature, or clear the world at once from folly, vanity, and affectation. With this hope, however, academies have been instituted, to guard the avenues of their languages, to retain fugitives, and repulse intruders : but their vigilance and activity have hitherto been vain ; sounds are too volatile and subtile for legal restraints ; to enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desires by its strength.'

Johnson's unequalled influence in matters of form and sense may be illustrated by the two words

conservancy and *internecine*. The first, which we use chiefly of the authority controlling the Thames fisheries, was earlier and correctly *conservacy*. Johnson accidentally inserted the *n* and the *n* has remained. The proper meaning of *internecine* is murderous, destructive. Johnson explains it as 'endeavouring mutual destruction,' and this is the sense present in the minds of most people, when they read or write of 'internecine war.'

It is interesting to compare his two ponderous volumes, which his contemporaries thought final, with the gigantic team-produced dictionaries of modern times. Stated mathematically, it may be said that in vocabulary and amount of typographical matter the great *Oxford Dictionary* is to Johnson what the latter is to Bullokar's diminutive *Expositour* of 1616. If we look up in a chronological series of dictionaries the 'pivotal' word *take*, we shall find : (1) that no lexicographer before Bailey thinks its inclusion necessary ; (2) that Bailey, in his folio edition, gives seventeen phrases illustrating the various senses of the word ; (3) that Johnson catalogues no fewer than 134 of its uses in various combinations ; (4) that the *Century Dictionary* devotes four pages to it and deals with it in thirty-five sections ; (5) that the *Oxford Dictionary* handles it in thirteen of its vast and closely printed pages, with divisions and subdivisions which I decline to count, concluding with a long section explaining and illustrating fifty-two separate meanings, current or obsolete, of the locution to 'take up.' And the *Oxford Dictionary* is far from complete. You will

search it in vain for *aspidistra* and *appendicitis*, *boche* and *bolshevist*, *cinema* and *camouflage*, *de-control* and *Dora*, *broadcasting* and *listening-in*, *bootlegging* and *dope-fiend*, for a dictionary published to-day is almost out-of-date to-morrow.

Johnson's legislative attitude towards the words he includes is what we should expect from his stately conversational style. The monosyllabic or reduplicating word of native growth, without contact with Latin or Greek, meets with little favour. *Swop* is a 'low word.' *Twittle-twattle*, which in his day combined the senses now expressed by *twaddle* and *tittle-tattle*, is a 'vile word.' *Wobble*—which he spells *wabble*—is a 'low, barbarous word.' Others of his 'low words' are the verbs to *budge* and to *coax*, and the adjective *touchy*. Archdeacon Todd, whose 19th-century edition of Johnson held the field for some time against the competition of Webster, and later on, of Worcester and Richardson, seems to have felt himself so far the inheritor of the prophetic mantle as to be entitled to assume the same dictatorial attitude. *Row*, a disturbance, is branded by him as 'a very low expression' and *chaperon* as 'an affected word of very recent introduction.' Johnson himself shows an unexpected tenderness for dialect words, especially for those in use in his native Staffordshire. I will instance only *lich*, 'a dead carcase; whence *lichwake*, the time or act of watching by the dead; *lichgate*, the gate through which the dead are carried to the grave; *Lichfield*, the field of the dead, a city in Staffordshire, so named from martyred Christians. *Salve magna parens.*'

Some of the most beautiful words in the language were nearly lost in the 18th century. In Bullokar's edition of 1688 I find, among many words marked as obsolescent, *blithe*, *glee*, *lay* (a song), *love*, *strand*, *weald*, *wold*, *wend*, and *wreak*. We owe much to Bishop Percy, to the early romantics, and perhaps most of all to Scott, for rescuing these lovely monosyllables, so rich in poetic suggestion. Johnson says of *glee*, 'It is not now used except in ludicrous writing, or with some mixture of irony or contempt.' It is strange to find him describing *jeopardy* as 'a word not now in use,' and to read under *smouldering*, 'This word seems to be a participle; but I know not whether the verb *smoulder* be in use.' The first statement is erroneous, for *jeopardy* was used by many of the Doctor's contemporaries, but it is true that *smoulder* fell out of use in the 17th and 18th centuries. The modern novelist, whose hero's eyes would lose half their effect if they did not periodically 'smoulder,' should be grateful to Scott for reviving this expressive word.

The makers of dictionaries, as already remarked, have often been schoolmasters, and it must be remembered that Johnson himself, at the age of twenty-six, started 'keeping school' near Lichfield, though he soon realized the truth of the sage maxim that schoolmastering is a very good profession—to get out of. Perhaps about as many have been country parsons, and I have a theory, based more upon impression than statistics, that the peaceful atmosphere of rural East Anglia has inspired an unusual number of clerical lexicographers. Nor is

the medical profession unrepresented. Bullokar was a Chichester doctor and Stephen Skinner, the author of the first English etymological dictionary in the strict sense of the word, was a physician in practice at Lincoln. This work, published in 1671, a few years after the author's death, under the title *Etymologicon Linguae Anglicanae*, was Johnson's chief authority for the etymological part of his own Dictionary. He used it uncritically, for he lacked altogether the etymological instinct and had the great disadvantage of knowing, as Macaulay says, 'little or nothing of any Teutonic language, except English, which indeed, as he wrote it, was scarcely a Teutonic language.'

It is in accordance with poetic justice that the great dictionary-makers of the age that followed Johnson should belong chiefly to the two races for which he professed a burlesque abhorrence, the Americans and the Scots. During the greater part of the 19th century no English dictionary enjoyed a prestige equal to that of Noah Webster's *Dictionary of the English Language*, which is still, in its most recent edition, a valuable authority. Webster produced no fewer than six dictionaries of various sizes, from his *Compendious Dictionary* of 1806 to his *Dictionary for Primary Schools* of 1834. His fellow-countryman, Joseph E. Worcester, went one better with seven. Moreover, the greatest complete¹

¹ Not now that the *Oxford Dictionary* is finished. See Ch. III, p. 41.

team-produced English dictionary is the *American Century Dictionary*, published in six volumes (1889-91) under the editorship of that distinguished philologist, William D. Whitney. For the Scots see Ch. III, p. 45.

CHAPTER III

THE 'OXFORD DICTIONARY'

SINCE the article reprinted here as Chapter II was written, the great *Oxford Dictionary*, the glory of English scholarship, has been completed, the final instalment having appeared in April 1928. The whole work comprises ten gigantic volumes (or twenty half-volumes), registers more than 400,000 words, gives nearly 2,000,000 illustrative quotations, covers a period of twelve centuries, uses 178 miles of type, and weighs approximately 200 pounds. It costs fifty guineas¹ and is probably, even from the point of view of bulk alone, the cheapest book on the market. Its accomplishment is due to the devoted labours of four chief editors, to the co-operation of a number of 'scriptorium' assistants and of a host of voluntary helpers, and to the munificence of the Oxford University Press. Its progress has been watched with eager interest by two generations of scholars and with complete indifference by the mass of the nation. It is to be found in every decent public library, although its existence usually escapes the notice of those volunteer instructors of the public who communicate their views to the papers whenever a new or

¹ The supply of copies is getting low and the price is now raised to seventy guineas. *Verb. sap.!*

interesting word happens to have excited momentary curiosity.¹

There have been, from the earliest times, a few choice spirits capable of appreciating the romance and beauty, the cultural and historical significance of word-lore, but it was Archbishop Trench who first made those treasures accessible to the reading public in his *Study of Words* (1851) and *English Past and Present* (1855). It was largely at his instigation, as a leading spirit in the Philological Society, that the

¹ I have a small collection of philological imbecilities, culled from the 'correspondence column' of various important papers. Some day I may include them in a book. It is a curious fact that, while only electricians write about electricity and only explorers about Central Africa, any amateur who possesses an old copy of Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* feels competent to lay down the law in matters of etymology. I never see the name without remembering Madame Roland and murmuring, 'O Brewer! O Brewer! que de crimes on commet en ton nom!' Here is a specimen from the *Times*—'The idea that the name *Whitsunday* has any connection with the wearing of "white" by the newly baptized in the primitive Church may, I suggest, be ruled out. . . . Brewer, in his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, refers to the idea that it is *Wit* or *Wisdom Sunday*. . . . The first Prayer-book of Edward VI, 1549, refers to the day as *Witsonday* in two places. Canon Bothamley rightly suggests that *Whitsun* is a vulgarism, but it is hardly recent, as the first Prayer-book above mentioned has in one place "Whitson weke." How the *h* crept in is a mystery, but its presence obviously gave rise to the "white" theory. It should not be there, and the present Prayer-book merely perpetuates an error. *Witsunday* makes sense and is, I venture to submit, the correct designation of the day.'

If the writer had drifted round to his local library and consulted the *Oxford Dictionary*, he would have found that 'the *h* crept in' before the Battle of Hastings, and that, to put it mildly, his letter is beside the mark. But one is inclined to wonder why a great newspaper should print such stuff.

collection of material for a national dictionary began in the middle of the 19th century. The task of setting the machine in motion fell to Herbert Coleridge, great-nephew of the poet, and Frederick James Furnivall. The latter, with characteristic enthusiasm and optimism, imagined that the work would be self-supporting, and even that vast profits, to be made available for the furtherance of knowledge, would flow into the coffers of the Philological Society. In point of fact the Dictionary has cost the Clarendon Press some £300,000. No millionaire has offered to shoulder part of the burden, and the only outside contribution has been a gift of £5,000 from the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, to whom Vol. VI (L, M, N) is gratefully dedicated.

The actual inception of the work dates from 1859, when Coleridge confidently hoped to begin publication in two years' time. After Coleridge's untimely death, in 1861, Furnivall was left to bear the burden alone, and, as frequently happens in such undertakings, material went on accumulating, volunteer editors went on editing, re-editing and sub-editing, and publication receded into the dim distance. It was not till 1879 that an agreement was made between the Philological Society and the Oxford Press, and that J. A. H. Murray was formally entrusted with the editorship. He began work in the 'scriptorium' at Mill Hill School, where he was a master. On February 1, 1884, appeared the first instalment of 'A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, founded mainly on the materials collected by the Philological Society, edited by James A. H.

Murray, B.A. Lond., Hon. M.A. Oxon., LL.D. Edin., D.C.L. Durham, etc., with the assistance of many scholars and men of science.' It was calculated that the whole *Dictionary* would be finished in about ten years. It took forty-four !

If I may be pardoned a personal reminiscence, I would remark that my interest in the *Dictionary* dates almost from boyhood, because that amazing linguistic genius, James Platt, who was reading papers to the Philological Society while yet in his 'teens, was my schoolfellow. Until his death he was the stand-by for the editors whenever a mysterious word from Choctaw, Tibetan, or Malagasy needed explanation. He worked with few books, and he was said to have more than a bowing acquaintance with about a hundred languages. My first acquaintance with Sir James Murray,¹ who for many years sent me his proofs to read, dates from the last decade of the 19th century. It is associated with a radiant July day, a pleasant inn in the woods, and a luncheon-party (chief items Black Forest trout and Ihringer Riesling) given in honour of the great lexicographer by Friedrich Kluge, most learned and most beloved of 'Germanists.' To this luncheon was invited, a trait of Kluge's unfailing kindness, a young Englishman who occupied an unimportant post at the University of Freiburg-im-Breisgau, and who listened with proper reverence to his betters while they discussed methods of lexicography and recondite problems in Middle English phonology. Normally,

¹ He was knighted in 1908.

the meal should have gradually transformed itself into a distinctly 'wet' afternoon; but to the startled horror of the jolly German professors, Murray shunned the Ihringer Riesling and drank a fluid which, at a German University of those days, was thought to have been created solely for the use of the lower animals.

The *Dictionary* will always be associated with the name and picturesque personality of Murray. At one time it was often referred to as 'Murray's,' especially by acrostic-makers and the like. Sir James, in his later years, hoped to complete the work on his eightieth birthday, but he died in 1915, at the age of seventy-eight, after a life of strenuous intellectual effort for which it would not be easy to find a parallel. It is noteworthy that, of the four editors-in-chief, two bear names that suggest the possibility of Scottish nationality, a possibility quickly converted into a certainty by the briefest interchange of words with either of them. The late Thorold Rogers once composed an 'imaginary conversation' between Dr. Johnson and Boswell, walking in the Elysian Fields.¹ The biographer asks his hero what he would say, if he were told that the compilation of the greatest of all English dictionaries had been entrusted to 'a Scotsman, a Presbyterian, living in Oxford,' to which the Doctor majestically replies, 'Sir, in order to be facetious, it is not necessary to be indecent.'

Romance is not a quality usually associated with

¹ I have this information from Thorold Rogers's son. Birkbeck Hill has also been credited with the 'dream.'

lexicography, though it is present more often than the layman might suspect ; but there certainly is romance in the amazing career of the man who became Murray's collaborator almost from the beginning and his successor as editor-in-chief. From 1863 to 1883 there lived in Sheffield a young clerk named Henry Bradley, employed by a cutlery firm. It was known to his friends that he was interested in languages (they probably called it 'dabbling'), and he occasionally published articles in the local press. In 1883 trade was bad, and Henry Bradley, with a wife and a young family, seemed likely to find himself out of a job. Fortunately his work had become known beyond the Sheffield area and had attracted the attention of distinguished scholars. Some of them advised him to try his luck in London and gave him introductions to the *Academy* and the *Athenæum*, at that time the two intellectual 'weeklies.' He followed this advice, and revealed himself almost immediately as a giant among philologists. As Dr. Robert Bridges¹ says, his good Providence 'was holding a trump card up her sleeve, having among her inscrutable devices arranged that his advent in London should exactly synchronize with the issue of the first instalment of the *New English Dictionary* ; so that, when on arrival he called at the *Academy* office for orders, Cotton plumped down her ace on the table, asking him for a five-column review. The desk on which that review was scribbled was one of the unopened

¹ In his memoir prefixed to *The Collected Papers of Henry Bradley* (Oxford, 1928).

packing-cases in his new house in Wandsworth Bridge Road: its immediate publication revealed to Dr. Murray a critic who could give him points; whereupon he penned an anxious invitation to Bradley to come inside.' Although Bradley at once became a valued colleague, he did not for some years remove to Oxford, whither Murray and the whole apparatus had migrated in 1886. The first section of the *Dictionary* with which his name is associated on the title-page is the letter E. Henceforward he and Murray produced alternate blocks of the work, until two younger editors came to their assistance. Bradley's death, in 1923, at the same age as Murray's, did not greatly stir the nation, though those qualified to judge knew that it meant the disappearance of one of the greatest scholars of all time.

In 1897, Dr. W. A. Craigie, now Sir William Craigie, was 'added to the board,' and Dr. C. T. Onions, who had long been helping in the great work, became a full editor in 1914. While Sir William Craigie was engaged upon his allotted portion, which included the tremendous problem of the unlimited number of words that can begin with *un-*, he departed to Chicago to show the Americans how to produce a national dictionary, though still continuing to share the English command-in-chief with Dr. Onions. Both editors are now busy with the *Supplement*, a copy of which will be presented gratis to every possessor of the *Dictionary*, an act of public-spirited generosity quite in consonance with the traditions of the Clarendon Press.

No account of the *Dictionary* would be complete which failed to emphasize the untiring services of Dr. Furnivall, who died in the summer of 1910, at the age of eighty-five, having continued up to the previous winter his practice of occasionally sculling from Hammersmith to Richmond and back ! In the early days of the planning of the *Dictionary* Furnivall was the driving force. In fact, it could never have been compiled in its monumental completeness, if he had not, with the *Dictionary* in mind, founded the Early English Text Society in 1864 and the Chaucer Society in 1868. The publications of these two Societies made accessible in print a mass of Middle-English literature hitherto preserved only in manuscript, and gave an altogether new idea of our medieval vocabulary. Up to the time of his death he was busily engaged in helping on the great work. As liaison officer between Oxford and the British Museum Library he was invaluable, but, thank Heaven, his bellicose and tempestuous personality was never concerned with the actual editing !

Until the end of his long life Furnivall never failed to put in an appearance at the gatherings of the Philological Society, a harmless little group of unobtrusive individuals who meet once a month in London. Many of the members have a vivid recollection of the two great scholars whose task is done, and know well the two much younger editors who happily survive and, it is to be hoped, have still long years of valuable work before them. ' Dictionary evening ' at the Philological was always an

excitement. The editor of the section in preparation arrived from Oxford with his bundle of proofs, told us how the *Dictionary* was getting on, and was bombarded with questions by members who wanted to know what documentary or etymological discoveries had been made with regard to age-old problems in word-history.

Since its migration to Oxford the *Dictionary* has had various homes, its final place of abode being the Old Ashmolean Museum. Here the busy workers were so often interrupted by inquiring visitors that one of them found it necessary to put on the door the notice—

‘ THIS IS NOT THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM,’

an inadequate protection to which were gradually added in succession the further statements—

‘ NOR THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE,’

‘ NOR THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY,’

‘ NOR THE CLARENDON BUILDING,’

and, finally—

‘ NOR THE MARTYRS’ MEMORIAL—
AS YET!’

The work of the assistants was to scrutinize and classify the millions of slips sent in by voluntary readers and to submit the results of their investigations of each word to the editors-in-chief. Of the thoroughness with which this work is done the layman can form no idea. The great difficulty did not

arise in handling the picturesque word with a fascinating history, but the common everyday word belonging to the primitive machinery of the language. I remember Sir James Murray mentioning one evening at the Philological Society that his best assistant had just spent six months on the word *that*! The editor's task was to reduce the scheme for each word to manageable proportions, to approve or modify the grouping of historical forms and the classification of senses, to make a final selection of quotations illustrating, in the case of true English words, literary usage from the days of Alfred the Great's great-grandparents down to the days of Mr. P. G. Wodehouse, and finally, most ticklish job of all, to establish the etymology of the word in question and its relations traceable among other languages of mankind. The solution of some of these problems has involved application to famous specialists in all parts of the world, and the number of distinguished scholars to whom indebtedness is acknowledged in the ten prefaces must run into hundreds.

The elaborate biography thus supplied for each word enables us to judge how far the theories of the earlier etymologists, from the excellent Minsheu (p. 26) down to Skeat, are possible or not. Skeat derives the slang verb to *slate*, chiefly used now of unfriendly criticism, from Anglo-Saxon *slætan*, to cause to rend. The *Oxford Dictionary* records show that it is an Irish vulgarism of the 19th century and that it originated from the practice of 'bonneting' an opponent by jamming his 'slate' (or 'tile'!)

over his eyes. 'Setting the Thames on fire' is a hyperbolical expression for which many parallels, English and foreign, can be quoted, but nothing will prevent the amateur philologist from writing to 'the papers' to explain that it should be *temse*, an old word for sieve, with the paralysing explanation, from an out-of-date Brewer (see p. 42, n.), that 'a hard-working active man would not unfrequently ply the "temse" so quickly as to set fire to the wooden hoop at the bottom.' Sometimes the chronological discrepancy which proves fatal to these card-castles is pathetically narrow. There is a colour called *isabel*, inadequately defined by Brewer as 'the yellow of soiled calico,' but easily recognized by anyone who has seen the 'isabelline bear' at the Zoo. The constantly repeated story is that, during the siege of Ostend, the Archduchess Isabella swore not to change her chemise till the fortress fell. As the siege lasted from 1601 to 1604, this imperious lady endured some discomfort and made a new colour fashionable at her court. If we turn to the *Oxford Dictionary*, we find that, in 1600, Queen Elizabeth's wardrobe included 'One rounde gowne of Isabelle-colour satten set with silver spangles.' The margin is 'not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve.'

It is obvious that such an undertaking could never have been carried out, nor even begun, without the assistance of the voluntary readers who furnished the accumulation of slips. These began to pile up in the fifties of last century and continued ever more mountainously down to the conclusion of

the work. Some readers sent in occasional contributions, others, interested during a lifetime in the undertaking, reached the 100,000 mark. It is, I believe, the opinion of Sir William Craigie, the third monarch of the editorial dynasty, that a few more years' delay in publication might have imperilled the success of the enterprise by confronting the editors with a mass of material too vast for human powers to handle. One of the most valued voluntary helpers was a tragic figure. A victim of persecution mania, he committed a purposeless murder and spent the rest of his days at Broadmoor, whence his contributions were for many years forwarded to Oxford. Highly decorated and quite mendacious accounts of his connection with the *Dictionary* appear from time to time in the Press.

It is inevitable that the earlier volumes of a work which was in progress for over half a century should show gaps. New words pour into English in a steady stream. The forty-four years occupied in the production of the *Dictionary* do not constitute a very long period in the history of a language, but, during these forty-four years, things, which naturally involve words, have moved with an ever-accelerating velocity. Our daily paper now has columns headed 'Flying,' 'Filmland,' 'Motor Matters,' 'Wireless,' etc., all dealing with activities undreamt-of when Murray started work. You will look in vain in the *Oxford Dictionary* for *airman*, though, oddly enough, *airmanship* is dated 1804, in connection with the handling of balloons, and *air-sickness* was coined by

Horace Walpole in 1784 in reference to Montgolfier's new invention. *Bingle* is not there, though *shingle*, as a hair-dressing term, is duly entered and explained. And its date? Guess. You would say about 1920? Well, it is 1857, and, like most modern English, it is American! *Bolshevist* is absent, as are *camouflage* and *cinema*, though the latter is brought in under K. There is plenty of information about *divot*, but the only meaning which the word has for the Southron is not mentioned, as golf had not then spread like a pestilence over our country-side. Naturally the later volumes are more up-to-date, though sometimes the editors have been really unlucky. They must have missed *sabotage* by inches and the cinema *vamp* by a hair's-breadth. Still, all these, and many others, will come into the Supplement, and we can congratulate the editors on still having a congenial task before them. There are still 'words' left for them to conquer!

The *Oxford Dictionary* is not the only, nor indeed the first, national dictionary conceived on a monumental scale. Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* began to appear in 1851, and is still in progress! The *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, also unfinished, dates from 1864, and the first part of the Swedish Academy's Dictionary appeared in 1893. Of these Grimm is naturally the most familiar to English students. It is a most valuable and admirable work, but in range of vocabulary, fullness of treatment, and typographical excellence it falls far behind the *Oxford Dictionary*. The fact is that in such undertakings able and devoted editors and

assistants are not the only essential factors. Much of the driving power is furnished by the technical and material resources of a great Press. But for the patriotism and wisdom of those who control the great Oxford establishment, which sprang from the profits on Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, the *Dictionary* could never have been begun with confidence, continued steadily for nearly half a century, and brought to a triumphant conclusion.

CHAPTER IV

NATIONAL SPORTS AND NATIONAL METAPHOR

JOSEPH STRUTT, the first writer to deal historically with the sports and pastimes of this country,¹ begins by saying that 'in order to form a just estimation of the character of any particular people, it is absolutely necessary to investigate the sports and pastimes most generally prevalent among them.' That the national character is reflected in the national speech is equally true, and, conversely, it may be said that the figurative element of the language is a certain clue to the habits, tastes, and pursuits of the people speaking it. For nine-tenths of language is metaphor, sometimes fossil, sometimes most living. If we suppose that some ethnologist of the far-distant future, attempting to reconstruct the characteristics of the English race, were wise enough to call in the assistance of the philologist, what would the latter be able to tell him? I think he would say: 'These records appear to belong to a race which, besides possessing the common stock of international metaphor drawn from the key industries of primitive man (hunting, weaving, agriculture, etc.), must have been particularly addicted to navigation, horsemanship, and all forms of sport. They seem to have had a positive mania

¹ *Sports and Pastimes of the English People* (1801).

for hunting, and they certainly much preferred play to work.'

That there is such a thing as national metaphor I think all will grant. The English language has a salt smack. The most stay-at-home Midlander who has never seen the sea can hardly get through the day without using some figure of speech dating back to the Elizabethan seamen, perhaps even to the Vikings. But our nautical metaphor is another story. Hebrew metaphor, with its constant allusions to vegetation and fresh water, the vine and the fig-tree, reflects the preoccupations of a race doomed to wring a scanty existence from the hostile desert. American metaphor, young and sprightly, as befits a young and sprightly nation, tells of the struggle with the primeval forest, of the railway, which is man's great helper in that struggle, and of the quest for mineral treasure. In the language of the United States to be *stumped* is to come up against an insuperable obstacle, like the settler whose plough is suddenly arrested by a root left in the forest clearing. *Log-rolling* reminds us of the communal effort required in building the back-woods settlement, when 'You roll my log and I'll roll yours' expressed readiness to help—for a consideration. The American prefers to *side-track* (in English to *shunt*) anything that hinders progress, and, if unsuccessful in one direction, promptly *switches on* to another. If floods or torrents carry away part of the track he is constructing, he describes it as a *wash-out*. The lucky prospector *strikes oil*: the unlucky one may pursue his fruitless quest *down to the bedrock*. Such phrases and figures

belong to the youth of a nation. A mature race like our own does not easily create new metaphors. Those engaged in a special craft or trade may use its technicalities figuratively among themselves, just as Mr. P. G. Wodehouse's entertaining young men take their imagery from billiards, the motor-car, the bridge table, and the golf links ; but such figures of speech do not readily establish themselves in the everyday language of the people, though ' playing for safety ' (from billiards) seems to be on the way to general adoption. Our stock of metaphor has been handed down to us from ancestors more or less remote, and it takes some such convulsion as a World War to make any noticeable addition to it.

Some think that Englishmen play too much. My own humble opinion is that they now play too little. The grand old tradition contained in the word *fair-play*, a word untranslatable into any language I am acquainted with, was not created by watching the skill and agility of twenty-two expensive Scotsmen, but by giving and taking hard knocks, the only way of learning to ' play the game '—another untranslatable phrase. Foreign races, especially those afflicted with excessive acuteness, look on pityingly at our devotion to sport and put us down for a stupid race. No doubt they are right. We are stupid. It is even said that we have not sufficient mental alertness to know when we are beaten. I suppose there is no accusation which so rankles with the average Englishman as that of ' unsportsmanlike ' behaviour, and the Prince of Wales expressed a genuinely national ideal when, in a speech made a

few years ago, he said that 'every child born in the country should have a sporting chance.'

A great deal of our sporting metaphor is not exclusively English. This applies especially to the indoor type of game. Of such games I suppose some form of dicing is as old as any. The obvious 'the die is cast' is traditionally ascribed to Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon. Less obvious is the use of 'it falls out' for 'it happens,' originally referring to the fall of the dice. The word *hazard*, now of such wide connotation, is said by a contemporary of the Crusades to have been the name of a castle in Palestine at which a new game of chance was invented, and the word *chance* itself, which is Old French for 'fall,' is another early legacy from the dice-box, though the exact meaning of the 'main chance' is obscure. So also Ger. *gefallen*, to please, originally referred to the division of spoil by 'casting lots,' the oldest meaning of *lot* being the wooden or metal symbol used in the operation. We now usually associate *aces* with cards, but they were once the single pips on dice, a fact of which we are reminded by the common expression 'within an ace of,' and by the use of 'the deuce!' to express the dismay of the gambler who has thrown the double ace. Our modern 'at sixes and sevens' appears to have been evolved, with an obscure transformation of sense, from the medieval to 'set on six and seven,' which in Chaucer means something like to 'go nap.' It is even probable that 'no great shakes' was originally applied to an unproductive throw of the dice.

Of equal antiquity with dice is *chess*, a word which is really the plural of *check*, which in its turn represents the Persian *shah*, king. The simple metaphor derived from the chess-board has long been used with special reference to warfare. *Check* for a repulse, and *stale-mate* for a position in which neither side can take the initiative, were commonly used during the World War, as they had been used long before. Not all of us perhaps realize that when we *check* a man's accounts, or forestall possible dishonesty by paying with a *cheque*, we are also using chess-board language ; or that the royal *exchequer* was once the board marked out in squares on which the Chancellor kept the royal accounts. *Jeopardy*, Old French *jeu parti*, divided game, was originally a chess problem. Chaucer speaks of ' the jeupardyes that coud the Grek Pithagores ' (*Blaunche the Duchesse*, l. 665), i.e. the chess manœuvres known to Pythagoras.

A very popular board-game with those who were too godly for dice and too stupid for chess was backgammon, which in Old French was called *reversier*, and in Dutch is *verkeerspel*, i.e. turn-game. In English it was also called *tables*, from the two folding leaves of which the backgammon board was composed. I am not acquainted with the technicalities of the game, so cannot explain exactly what is meant by the familiar expression to ' turn the tables on ' an adversary. The obsolete game of *lurch*, which has given us to ' leave in the lurch,' is supposed to have been of similar character.

From card-playing comes *above-board*, where *board* has the archaic sense of ' table,' as still in

'board and lodging.' Dr. Johnson tells us that '*above-board*' is a figurative expression from gamblers, who, when they put their hands under the table, are changing their cards.' Its natural opposite is *underhand*. To 'sweep the board' is to win all the stakes. A 'lone hand' is from the 18th-century game called quadrille. More modern are to 'show one's hand,' in the sense of allowing one's opponent to see one's cards, and to 'go nap,' while the figurative use of 'long suit,' for special ability or advantage, is a coinage of the last few years. To 'lead up to' and to 'force one's hand' are both from the whist-table, while to 'palm off' and to 'foist on' are card-sharpping or dicing terms. From the sharper's practice of 'packing the cards' unfairly comes the modern to 'pack a jury.' The figurative use of *shuffle* is of similar origin. To 'play fast and loose' is from an obsolete cheating game with a string or strap.

If we were dealing with American metaphor, this would be the place for a short excursus on the origin and history of *bluff*, a word from the game of poker, which so far supplies a long-felt want that it has been adopted by many European languages. Readers of Mr. Kipling will remember how the crew of the s.s. *Bolivar* 'euchred God Almighty's storm, bluffed the eternal sea.' The Elizabethan word was *vie*, which has long lost all association with cards. In speaking of a man on whom complete reliance can be placed, we sometimes call him a *trump*. The figurative use of this word is as old as Bishop Latimer, who, in his famous *Sermon on the Card* (1529),

says, 'Now turn up your trump, your heart—hearts is trump, as I said before.' The use in French of *ace* for a brilliant airman is a parallel, *ace* having here, of course, the card sense. Approximating to a *trump* is a 'sure card,' whence perhaps is evolved the later 'queer card,' as applied to a person, and finally, with ellipsis of the adjective, Mr. Arnold Bennett's 'Card.' From cards comes also the use of 'turn up' in the special sense of putting in an appearance. We are still conscious of the connection, when we say, of one intervening helpfully, that he 'turned up trumps.'

When we turn to the history of outdoor sports, we find a sharp division between those practised by the Norman noble and by the English burgher or peasant. This division is reflected linguistically in the fact that the vocabulary of the tournament, of falconry, and of tennis is chiefly of French origin, while that of the cheaper popular sports, such as archery, wrestling, and cudgel-playing, is mostly English. From the tournament we have to 'run full tilt,' as Don Quixote did when he 'tilted at wind-mills,' and we still speak figuratively of 'entering the lists' and 'breaking a lance,' while a verbal exchange is sometimes called a 'passage of arms.'¹ But the contribution made by aristocratic sport is usually insignificant compared with that which is due to the people.

The tournament declined with the decay of

¹ This appears, however, to be one of Scott's coinages (cf. *free-lance*, p. 205). It is not recorded before the 'gentle and joyous passage of arms at Ashby-de-la-Zouch' (*Ivanhoe*).

chivalry, and the young noble of the 15th century began to forsake the tilt-yard for the tennis-court. This aristocratic game, of which lawn-tennis is but a degenerate scion, seems to have been even more popular in France than in England, if we may judge by its contribution to popular metaphor. 'Prendre la balle au bond' (i.e. to take the ball at the bound¹) is colloquial French for to 'seize an opportunity'; and the fact that the professional keeping of tennis-courts was handed down from father to son is responsible for the curious expression 'enfant de la balle' for a son who adopts his father's calling. French *volée* and English *volley* were both probably used of the flight of the tennis-ball before being applied to a discharge of projectiles, and the following passage from Nashe (1596) might almost refer to contemporary Wimbledon—'One that stands, as it were, at the line in a tennis-court, and takes every ball at the volley.'

To tennis we owe the phrase to 'drive from pillar to post,' though its exact meaning has not been traced. The allusion is to the driving of the tennis-ball, and the earlier order, found in Lydgate, was 'from post to pillar.' This was inverted to facilitate the stock rhyme with 'tossed.' In the old play *Liberality and Prodigality* (1602), a character is described as—

' Every minute tost,
Like to a tennis-ball, from pillar to post.'

¹ Cf. 'Perdre la volée pour le bond,' explained by Cotgrave as 'to lose an opportunity, by neglecting it, upon a hope that it will returne.'

In John Marston's comedy *What you Will* (1607) the phrase is used of battledore and shuttlecock, the context suggesting that the *pillar* and *post* were names given to the two ends of the court. The following explanation has occurred to me as possible. It is known that modern games have developed from simple beginnings, e.g. fives was originally played against any convenient wall, and the 'pepper-box' of a modern fives-court imitates one of the buttresses of Eton College Chapel. Tennis is supposed to have sprung from a rudimentary ball-game played with simple apparatus in the court-yards of mansions and castles. The entrance gate and the front door would naturally be adopted as the two ends of the court, the 'pillars' of the one and the 'posts' of the other serving as boundaries. Another verb commonly used in this connection was to *bandy*. We now *bandy* only remarks, invectives, etc.; but Juliet uses the word in its literal sense, when she says of the lagging messenger—

' Had she affections and warm youthful blood,
She'd be as swift in motion as a ball ;
My words would bandy her to my sweet love,
And his to me.'

(*Romeo and Juliet*, ii. 5)

What the tourney was to the noble we may say that archery was to the commoner ; and as it is the commoner, and not the noble, who makes the language, it is not surprising to find that the bowman's contribution to metaphor far exceeds that of the armoured knight. It must be remembered that

during the Middle Ages every able-bodied Englishman was an expert with—

‘ The crooked stick and the gray-goose wing,
Without which England were but a fling.’

After attending divine service on Sunday morning, the craftsman betook himself to the town fields, the peasant to the village green, to practise archery. This was long ago. With the progress of civilization these irreligious customs gradually lapsed, and the Englishman took to waiting with Sabbath calm for the public-houses to open. The crossbowman shot a short heavy arrow called a *bolt*, which we still use in the phrase ‘ bolt upright,’ with which compare ‘ straight as a dart.’ This sense of *bolt* also survives in *thunderbolt* and ‘ a bolt from the blue ’ (the latter, however, adopted by Carlyle from German), and in the verb to *bolt* (i.e. to go off like an arrow from the bow), the further transition to ‘ bolting one’s food ’ being easy and natural. Our ancestors spoke of ‘ making a bolt or a shaft ’ much as country folk still speak of ‘ making a spoon or spoiling a horn,’ and the proverbial saying that ‘ a fool’s bolt is soon shot ’ is, I suppose, still good current English.

The word *target* is modern in its current sense. The medieval bowman spoke of the *mark* or the *butt*, and such phrases as ‘ beside the mark,’ to ‘ overshoot the mark,’ ‘ not up to the mark,’ ‘ wide of the mark,’ all come from archery, the last having been adopted in the elliptical form of *wide* by cricket. We still use *butt* in something like its medieval sense in ‘ rifle-butts,’ and to ‘ make a butt of ’ a person is to use

him as the target of one's satiric missiles. To 'hit the nail on the head' now suggests the competent carpenter, but originally referred to the nail or pin which marked the centre of the bull's-eye. Perhaps the commonest current phrase in which connection with archery is preserved is that of 'two strings to one's bow,' whence also the figurative use of 'first (second) string.'

In medieval English distances were often roughly estimated by archery practice, e.g. we find 'butt-shot,' 'flight-shot,' etc., where the Elizabethans rather calculate by 'musket-shot,' 'saker-shot,' etc. The oldest meaning of the verb to *rove* is to shoot at unspecified marks and distances, i.e. at random, a meaning surviving in our 'roving glance.' The city fathers of Coventry, anxious either for good archery or for the public safety, enacted in 1474 that 'No maner persone of this citie frohensfurth rove, but shote at stonding prikkes and buttes' (*Coventry Leet-Book*). Finally, there are two words of which the connection with archery is now completely lost. One is *scope*, from the Greek word for a target. The other is *upshot*, which, in the 16th century, was the deciding shot in a match.

Archery declined along with chivalry, villainous saltpetre being partly responsible for the eclipse of both. No doubt the crowding into towns, where open spaces were lacking, had something to do with the neglect of the bow. Many attempts were made to arrest this decay. Ascham wrote *Toxophilus* in praise of archery, and Henry VIII founded the

Honourable Artillery Company (it will be remembered that *artillery* is the word used in the Bible for Jonathan's bow and arrows) ; but all in vain, and this terrible weapon, against which the musketeers of the 17th century would have been as helpless as sheep, survived only as a toy. Legend still preserves, along with Robin Hood and his merry men, the names of Adam Bell, Clim o' the Cleugh, and William of Cloudeslie, as renowned in their day as any prize-fighter or film-star in our own ; and I cannot help thinking that the expression to ' draw the long-bow ' must have originally referred to some venerable survivor of Bosworth Field fond of favourably contrasting the weapon of his youth with the new-fangled firearms, so apt to ' hang fire ' or ' flash in the pan.' Probably *point-blank*, now associated with guns, really belongs to archery, the ' blank,' or white, being the centre of the target, at which the bowman could, if near enough, ' point ' without allowing for wind or trajectory.

Just as the nobleman abandoned the tilt-yard for the tennis-court, so the commoner forsook archery for bowls. The game is ancient, but was always frowned on by Church and State, partly because it led to the decay of archery, but also because it was commonly associated with gambling and knavery. It has given us the expressive *rub*, i.e. ' rub of the green,' for an unexpected difficulty or obstacle, and the word *bias*, in its earlier use, is always associated with the curving course of the bowl. Shakespeare seems to have frequented the bowling-green. In *Richard II* (iii. 4), the

queen, when a lady suggests a game of bowls, replies—

‘ ’Twill make me think the world is full of rubs,
And that my fortune runs against the bias.’

In the Bastard's last speech in the second act of *King John*, ‘commodity’ is called ‘the bias of the world,’ the bowling metaphor being elaborated at considerable length. *Début*, which we borrowed from France in the 18th century, was originally the opening shot at bowls. There were two varieties of the game, known as ‘short-bowls’ and ‘long-bowls,’ and the latter was commonly used by seamen of Nelson's time for an engagement at long range. I gather that bowls is now an essentially respectable game, played chiefly by the elderly and sedate. It has handed on its name as a cricket term, the verb to *bowl* dating from the time when the cricket-ball was trundled underhand like a wooden bowl. To cricket we owe the figurative sense of to ‘bowl out,’ while to ‘bowl over’ comes from skittles, the game which took over the more wicked traditions of bowls, including the proverbial association with beer, the combination being taken to represent the workers' Elysium.*

Perhaps no form of medieval sport is responsible for more figures of speech than falconry. Its vocabulary, like that of every branch of the chase, was highly specialized, and most of the metaphors connected with it have long lost their original association. The complimentary adjective *debonair*, of

prehistoric antiquity, probably meant 'of good race,' applied to hawks much as we use *thoroughbred* of horses. Such a hawk would only 'fly at higher game,' unlike the *haggard*, or untrained hawk, which would, as Shakespeare says, 'check at every feather' (*Twelfth Night*, iii. 1). The fore-claws of the hawk were called the *pounces*, whence the verb to 'pounce upon.' We have long dropped this word in favour of *talon*, which is French for heel and was used by the medieval falconer only of the heel-claw. To *reclaim* now means only to reform. In Chaucer's time it meant to call back the hawk after its flight, and the *lure*, an Old French word for 'bait,' also acquired the special sense of the pipe or call used by the falconer in reclaiming the hawk. Juliet, like all young ladies of her time, was familiar with the technicalities of falconry—

' Oh for a falconer's voice,
To lure this tassel-gentle back again.'
(*Romeo and Juliet*, ii. 2)

Two technical phrases, apparently almost synonymous, were used in connection with the hawk's soaring flight. In *Macbeth* (ii. 4) we read of 'A falcon towering in her pride of place' (i.e. at her highest point of flight), a phrase which is also the clue to 'towering passion,' first used by Shakespeare, and revived in more recent times, like so many other Shakespearean coinages, by Scott. The other phrase is 'at full pitch.' Glapthorne, in his forgotten comedy *The Hollander* (1640), describes Rage as 'Like a falcon towering at full pitch o'er the trembling fowl.' We still use 'pride of place'

and 'full pitch,' but in senses quite remote from the original metaphor.

The verb to *rouse* is first recorded of the hawk ruffling its feathers preparatory to taking flight. The dialect *sharp-set*, hungry, seems to have been originally used of the hawk's appetite, though it rather suggests an edged tool. Falcons that clawed and scratched their fellows were said to *crab* each other, a word we now use in reference to the claws of the unfriendly critic. People still *plume* themselves on their real or imagined advantages, an expression which seems to be a substitution for the much earlier *prune* or *preen*, used of the hawk trimming its feathers on its perch. This was originally *proin*, from Old French *poroindre*, to anoint thoroughly—'She [the hawk] proynith when she fetchith oyle with hir beke and anoyntith hir fete and hir federis' (*Book of St. Albans*, 15th century). It is uncertain whether 'in fine feather' belongs to falconry or to cock-fighting (p. 76).

The fact that an essentially aristocratic sport like hawking should have made so large a contribution to popular speech is perhaps to be explained by its exercise requiring much professional help from the commoner. This is indicated by the frequency of the surname *Falconer*, *Faulkner*, etc. The same remark applies to hunting, also a sport monopolized by the noble classes. The simpler metaphors connected with hunting are the common property of the nations, but, in England, fox-hunting is responsible for a special group of figurative expressions. When the historian of the future notes that, in our

day, the elect of the people were hustled in and out of the Parliamentary division-lobbies by *whips*, he will conclude, and rightly, that early Parliaments were chiefly composed of fox-hunting squires. Essentially fox-hunting terms are to 'run to earth,' 'going strong,' to 'head off,' 'in full cry,' to 'hark back,' 'in at the death.' Less obvious are to 'give a lead,' i.e. to show the way over a fence to a rider whose mount hesitates, and to 'take one's own line.' To 'get wind of,' 'something in the wind,' refer to the scent. We say of a man who has met with disaster that he has 'come a cropper,' i.e. fallen on his head, thus preserving an old meaning of *crop*, of which the only other survival is 'neck and crop.' The variant to 'come a mucker' would appear to allude to the look of the rider whose fall has taken place on miry ground. Such disasters often fall to the lot of those who ride 'neck or nothing,' a phrase rather difficult to analyse. One who is following a course bound to terminate in disaster is said to be 'riding for a fall,' and a great philosophic truth is contained in the hunting proverb 'It's the pace that kills, not the miles.' Quite recently the nation was advised by a wise politician 'not to jump its fences till it came to them.' To clear an obstacle 'in one's stride,' i.e. without any change of gait, is also from the hunting-field, and it is a well-known fact that 'a red herring across the trail' will throw the hounds off the scent. I imagine that many educated foreigners, however well versed in English, might be puzzled by the following—'Mr. M. advances an argument for polygamy from

the supposed majority of adult females. This is a red herring. We are discussing birth-prevention, not polygamy.' 'At fault' and 'at a loss' were both first used of hounds, and their disorderly scattering when the scent was lost was called 'running riot.'

Much older than these fox-hunting phrases are some others connected with the medieval chase. To 'beat about the bush' is apparently combined from two phrases of different meaning, viz. to 'beat the bush,' in order to start the game, and to 'go about the bush,' used of a hound which shows no anxiety to tackle the wild animal in the thicket. A dog which missed its birds was said to *blink* them, whence our use of the verb for wilfully failing to see what is obvious. The good pointer or *setter* could be trusted to 'make a dead set.' On special occasions it was usual to enclose a section of the forest with an immense net which prevented the game from escaping. Such a net was called a *toil*, from the French *toile*, a woven fabric. Hence the phrase 'in the toils.' As the birds or deer were driven, each of the hunting party 'singled out' his victim. A more strenuous and sportsmanlike form of exercise was represented by the 'wild-geese chase,' a race which involved headlong riding 'through thick and thin,' Chaucer's phrase (A. 4064) for the varying degrees of obstruction offered by vegetation to a galloping horse. A *relay* (French *relais*) consisted originally of fresh hounds, which were 'released' to take the place of those that showed fatigue. The poetic word *tryst* (meeting-place) is one of the oldest words of the hunting vocabulary. It comes to us from Old

French, but its ultimate origin and exact meaning are unknown.

To 'run with the hare and hunt with the hounds' has replaced the older expression to 'hold with the hare and run with the hounds' (Heywood, 1561). The oldest sense of *ruse* is the 'doubling' of the hunted animal. Perhaps the oddest and least obvious expression which belongs to this region of ideas is to 'take heart of grace.' This is a kind of stupid and unintelligible pun on 'hart of grease' (i.e. fat stag), *grease* being the word regularly used by the medieval Nimrod in reference to the condition of deer. The two words *hart*, *heart*, were spelt alike in Middle English, and there may have been some clumsy attempt to play on 'fat hart' and 'stout heart.' Palsgrave (1536) quotes 'I take herte a gresse, as one doth that taketh a sodayne courage upon hym.' A very modern figure from shooting is the expressive *sitter*, used of an enterprise offering no more difficulty than the shooting of a bird on the roost. This is much the same as the earlier *pot-shot*, when, food and not sport being the object, the hunted animal receives no *law*, and, under the circumstances, may be regarded as 'fair game.'

The way in which the idiom of one sport intrudes upon that of another is illustrated by the expression to 'bag a brace,' which the unsuccessful batsman has adopted from shooting parlance. Another example is the cricketer's *daisy-cutter* for the kind of ball that schoolboys used to call a sneak, the description having been originally applied to a horse that does not lift its feet properly in trotting.

Every Englishman naturally loves a horse, though he knows that he must have his wits about him when he buys one. The slang word *fake*, of obscure origin, appears to have been first used in connection with doctoring horses for sale. In the 17th century a horse-dealer was a *jockey*, a word which we now limit to a professional rider. This is simply the northern form of the name Jack. Dr. Johnson defines a jockey as 'a cheat, a trickish fellow,' and from the noun we have formed the slang verb to *jockey*, i.e. to swindle. A curious parallel to this is the archaic verb to *cozen*, which comes from the Italian *cozzone*, a horse-dealer, defined also in a 17th-century dictionary as 'a craftie knave.' In buying a horse it is usual to 'put him through his paces.' If the result is satisfactory, and the horse is found to 'go the pace,' 'without turning a hair,' he may be described as 'thorough-paced.' It is characteristic of the general down-hill tendency of language that we now only use this adjective in describing scoundrels; but Fuller tells us that the Emperor Constantius 'was a thorough-pac'd Christian.' Some purchasers prefer an 'easy-going' horse—an epithet now more often applied to persons. To 'have the whip-hand,' to 'get the bit between one's teeth,' to 'kick over the traces,' to 'be saddled with,' to 'get out of hand,' to 'ride upon the snaffle or the curb,' to 'give one his head,' are equestrian phrases of which every Englishman understands the figurative applications. The riding-horse for everyday use was a *hackney*, or *hack*, a word now applied especially to the uncreative literary man.

Among really horsey people this kind of metaphor is everyday speech. Optimistic cheerfulness suggests 'full of beans,' while a temporary loss of appetite is described as being 'off one's oats.' An attractively turned out lady is 'well-groomed,' and the hunting-man who feels a little out of sorts decides to go and be *vetted*. One has even heard of a writer having an article 'vetted' by a specialist before sending it in. These figures of speech are obvious, but not everybody knows that by far the oldest meaning of *interfere* (Old French *entreféir*, to strike together) is for a horse to knock its legs together in trotting. *Roughshod*, i.e. with nails projecting from the shoes, is simple, and its figurative use (to 'ride over rough-shod') is very old; but our English habit of suppressing, so to speak, the middle term of a metaphor must rather puzzle the foreigner who finds bluntness described as 'a roughshod disregard of other people's feelings.' It is only in England that a serious statesman could write such a sentence as, 'The Government ran [for the Speakership] a dark horse—Mr. Gully—who, after an exciting race [he might have called it 'neck and neck'!], just won by a short head' (H. H. Asquith, afterwards Earl of Oxford, in the *Sunday Times*, October 25, 1923).

We still occasionally use the phrase to 'bear away the bell' in the sense of success. This is a reminiscence of the time when a silver bell, now replaced by a cup, was the prize for a horse-race. In 1609 the Chester Cup was a bell. Our earliest authority for the word *handicap* is Pepys, who uses

it of a kind of lottery game, in which winners were penalized to the profit of the pool. The name suggests the drawing of lots from a hat. Its current sense is of later development. A special kind of handicapping has given us the phrase 'give and take.' The golfer's handicap naturally suggests *scratch*, the mark from which competitors started in a race, and to which pugilists stood up. This has given us to 'come up to the scratch,' almost synonymous with to 'toe the line.' To *scratch*, erase a name from the list of competitors, represents another sense of the word. It is annoying to find that the horse one has backed has been *scratched*, because everyone likes to 'have a run for his money.' An equivalent of *scratch*, in the sense of starting-line, was *score*, the earliest meaning of which was a long mark or incision. To 'go off at score,' expressing the idea of abrupt departure, alluded originally to what we call a 'false start.' I do not know whether Mr. Lloyd George approves of horse-racing, but on May 24, 1918, he expressed the opinion that 'wrong is often a good starter, but always a bad stayer,' illustrating special senses acquired by these two verbs in sporting language. Chaucer uses the expression to 'start a hare,' and, when we speak of 'starting a discussion,' we are using hunting metaphor. In racing, a *walk-over* occurs when, in the absence of other competitors, the single animal traverses the course *pro forma* at an easy pace. To 'weigh in' with an argument likens the disputant to the successful jockey 'weighing in' after winning a race. If he has won 'hands down,' his mount has

needed no urging at the finish. To horsemanship also belongs the phrase to 'ride a hobby to death,' *hobby* being, like *dobbin*, a medieval nickname for a horse. Both words are pet forms of Robert. The slang use of the verb to *bar*, in the sense of to except, comes from the bookmaker, and one has heard a ploughed examinee or an unsuccessful suitor described as an 'also ran,' though, as the result showed, 'out of the running.'

The least sportsmanlike of sports are those in which animals, human or otherwise, are pitted against each other for the delectation of spectators. The word *pitted* at once suggests one of the oldest of such sports, viz. cock-fighting, a pursuit to which we owe a good many modern expressions, including the word *cockpit* for a theatre of strife. We even say of anything superlatively amusing that it 'beats cock-fighting,' and to 'live like fighting-cocks' is an indication of the luxury enjoyed by those favoured birds. To 'show the white feather' alludes to the belief that a white feather in the tail of a gamecock was a sign that the bird would not 'show fight,' or at the best would 'fight shy.' We can imagine the owner of such a failure sadly admitting, 'That cock won't fight.' The beaten cock was described as *crestfallen*, the victor 'crowing over' him. A general engagement between two teams of birds was called a 'battle royal,' a name given earlier in the Middle Ages to a battle with kings in command on both sides. To this sport we also owe the curious development of the word *game*, originally

an abstract noun with the general sense of 'sport,' which has now partly replaced it. A bird used in cock-fighting was called a 'cock of the game,' then, for short, *gamecock*, a compound in which *game* was later felt to have the adjectival sense of valiant, resolute, in which sense it has passed into current English, as in to 'die game.' A curious link between the cockpit and the Chicago gunman is supplied by the word *heeled*, originally used of the cock armed with steel spurs, but now of the gangster who 'packs a gat.'

The less aristocratic sport of dog-fighting has given the phrase to 'set by the ears,' the ear being the favourite objective of the combatants. The French even have a proverb to the effect that a quarrelsome dog always has a torn ear. The hero of many dog-fights became what was called *hard-bitten*, an epithet which we still use of a tough customer. My daily paper is my authority for the statement that 'the bottom dog has a bad time in Afghanistan,' but most writers of to-day prefer to use the Americanism *under-dog*, a description apparently due to the same Transatlantic delicacy which, in such phrases as 'back of the house,' avoids the anatomical suggestions of the word *behind*.

In early records we find cock-fighting associated with bull-baiting. The word *bait* is derived from Icelandic, and means to 'make bite,' a sense still conspicuous in the case of the fisherman's bait. When it was thought desirable to give the baited animal a rest, the dogs were driven off with staves, a practice to which we owe our phrase to 'stave off,'

which we now use in quite a different sense. 'Choking off' was rather more hazardous. Bulls were baited regularly in all English towns, while bear-baiting was generally practised in the more thickly populated centres. The *bear-garden* early acquired a character which survives in our use of the word. I am not sure which animal is originally referred to in the expression to 'lead by the nose,' but in a comedy from which I have already quoted (Glapthorne's *Hollander*) it is said of a character that 'he may be led by the nose as quietly as the tamest bear in the garden.' Horace Walpole uses *bear-leader* for a travelling tutor in charge of a *cub* who needs 'licking into shape.' The superstition that the bear-cub is shapeless at birth and is 'licked into shape' is found in Greek literature, and is said to be traceable in Egyptian hieroglyphics. It is probably from the bear-garden that we get the adjective *bearish* and the proverbial 'bear with a sore head,' as the animal was not otherwise known to our ancestors. The sport of badger-baiting is responsible for our colloquial verb to *badger*, and also for a special sense of the verb to *draw*, 'badger-drawing' being a form of baiting. Somewhat similar in meaning is the phrase to 'get a rise' out of a person, in which the victim is likened to a trout.

The bear-garden was also the scene of sword-play, cudgel-play, wrestling, and pugilism. Much of the metaphor of the sword is simple. Everyone realizes what is meant by a *home-thrust*. Less obvious is *repartee*, originally a counter-thrust, or the figure implied in the words *forte* and *foible*, for a man's

strong and weak points. These two words were applied by French fencing experts to the upper, or strong, and the lower, or weak, parts of the sword-blade (' le fort et le faible '), and the knowledge of a man's *forte* and *foible* was acquired by encountering him with the foils. Before the encounter it was usual for two opponents to ' measure swords ' ¹ with each other. The homelier cudgel has given us the familiar to ' take up the cudgels ' and the expressive to ' cudgel one's brains,' the latter phrase being first recorded, like so much of our modern phraseology, in Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, v. 1). Of earlier date than to ' take up the cudgels ' is the archaic to ' take up the bucklers,' from the medieval encounters with sword and buckler which preceded scientific fencing. To modern wrestling of the jiu-jitsu type we owe the current *strangle-hold*, while the medieval form of the sport has given us to ' have the pull of ' and to ' catch on the hop,' a recent and meaningless alteration of the earlier to ' catch on the hip,' a manœuvre apparently akin to a *cross-buttock*. The *dead-lock*, when neither of the combatants ' at grips ' can safely let go, is something like the position which the French, like the ancient Greeks, describe as ' holding the wolf by the ears.'

I do not know at what date the bear-garden added pugilism to its attractions. The prize-fights which Pepys saw there were with swords. But the great vogue of the ring in the 18th and 19th centuries has

¹ First recorded in Shakespeare (*As You Like It*, iv. 4). He is also our earliest authority for to ' measure one's length,' used of a prostrate attitude.

enriched the language with many choice images. Mr. Lloyd George, in 1917, spoke of this country as 'keeping the ring' and 'seeing fair play,' i.e. not letting the encounter degenerate into a 'rough-and-tumble,' which usually ends by the victor 'wiping the floor' with the vanquished. A few years ago our most serious daily paper described the powerful interests which choose Presidents in the United States as 'sparring for position,' using a verb which was taken over by the prize-ring from the cockpit. On the day after the Armistice was declared more than one dignified daily headed its leading article, 'Germany throws up the sponge.' During the War the necessity of the 'knock-out blow' was emphasized by the bitter-enders (see p. 196), and the defection of Russia was felt as a blow 'below the belt.'

It has been my recent experience to give instruction in English to a number of highly educated students of French nationality. It is interesting to observe that to these students, who are thoroughly conversant with literary English, most of the expressions which I have quoted in this chapter are full of mystery. They would be still more puzzled by the fancy variations which are used in the ultra-sporting language of pugilism, a language in which nothing is called by its name. The eyes become 'peepers' or 'optics,' the teeth 'ivories,' an important part of the internal economy is described as the 'pantry,' and the drawing of vital fluid from an opponent's nose takes the picturesque guise of 'tapping his claret.' From a novel by Mr. Oliver

Onions I glean the information that 'chucking up the sponge' is sometimes expressed as 'skying the wiper.' There is really a good deal of imagination in this peculiar language of the ring. What, for instance, could be more expressive than 'in chancery,' for a pugilist whose head is in a position from which it cannot be extricated without serious damage?

It will be noticed that I have made no reference to our two national games. Cricket is not of very great antiquity and was probably at first a local game. What small contribution it has made to our metaphor is comparatively recent. The use of the word *cricket* in the general sense of fair-play is not in the *Oxford Dictionary*, so would appear to be an introduction of the last few years. Mr. Lloyd George, speaking at Indianapolis, October 23, 1923, rather mixed his metaphors, if he was correctly reported as saying that 'when a man is down and counted out, it is not cricket to kick him,' for he evidently realized the pugilistic origin of 'down and out.' Probably an American audience would not have understood *jannock* (p. 13). To 'keep one's end up' is also, I believe, comparatively modern. The five-minute bombardments of our seaside resorts by German destroyers were commonly called 'tip and run raids.' I remember reading in the parliamentary news that 'Mr. Marshall Stevens had two questions down to the Prime Minister. On the first occasion Mr. Neal fielded substitute for Mr. Lloyd George.' Any Englishman understands what is

meant, but the metaphor is not in general use. Perhaps the most familiar cricket phrase is to 'score off,' which likens the baffled one to an unsuccessful bowler. I believe that this figure of speech came into use at Cambridge about 1880. Football is now a game of skill. Its medieval ancestor apparently was not. The early allusions to it, from the 14th century onwards, are in legal enactments forbidding its practice, the general opinion being well expressed by Elyot, who, in his *Governour*, describes it as 'nothing but beastly fury and extreme violence.' It has made, as far as I know, no important contribution to English metaphor, for the figurative sense of *goal*, as in 'the goal of one's ambition,' is from the foot-race. With the foot-race is also connected the modern expression 'never to look back,' used of a career of uninterrupted success, like that of the runner who leads easily 'from start to finish.' And, by the way, the word *career* itself originally meant a chariot-race, a sense which is still hazily present to our minds when we speak of a runaway team 'careering' down the street.

CHAPTER V

BABY'S CONTRIBUTION TO SPEECH

THE question of the origin of human speech will never be solved, and wise men are satisfied with noting its phenomena without attempting to explain the inexplicable. The **many** theories that have been propounded range from the pious belief that speech was divinely conferred on man to the crude assertion that words, with all their possibilities of beauty, their infinite power of expressing the most subtly differentiated ideas, have been gradually evolved from the grunts and howls that primitive man had in common with the beasts. This latter theory, which belongs to the evolutionary school of the middle of the 19th century, is sometimes referred to as the 'bow-wow theory,' a name coined for it in 1864 by Max Müller.

Without committing ourselves to this, or any other, view, we may safely grant that we owe something of our speech to the animals, and especially to that most interesting of all animals, the baby. If we could imagine a baby to be entirely brought up amongst deaf and dumb people, and thus dependent upon his own powers of observation for the creation of a vocabulary, we may be sure that he would never arrive at such names as *hound*, *dog*, *canis*, or *kuōn* for his four-footed companion. In all probability

he would coin a title approximating to *bow-wow*. The exact form might be conditioned by his ancestry, for it is a curious fact that babies of different nationalities interpret animal cries variously. The *cock-a-doodle-doo* of the English chanticleer is to a French ear *cocorico*, to a German *kikeriki*. That the more clearly defined note of the cat offers fewer opportunities for variation is evident from the fact that the Chinese for cat is *miau*, a form, by the way, much more acoustically accurate than our conventional literary *mew*. The feline murmur of pleasure is less easily represented by spelling, and there is a wide difference between our *purr* and the equally expressive French *ronron*. *Puss* represents perhaps an attempt to reproduce the spitting of the enraged tabby, and it is interesting to notice that the animal is also called *pus* in Persian and Afghan. So, when Adam 'gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field,' it is highly probable that his nomenclature was largely of the 'bow-wow' type.

All this does not especially concern the baby, at least not in his earliest attempts at word-formation, for, as can be seen from the names of many exotic animals, the tendency of primitive races, and not only of their inarticulate offspring, is to name the beast or bird from its cry. Civilized man goes farther, and even attempts to interpret animal sounds in terms of human speech. It is thus that we get such names as *whippoorwill*, *katydid*, *bobolink*, the last name having been given by early settlers in America, to whom the bird's note suggested

Bob o' Lincoln. So also the New Zealanders sometimes convert the Maori *mopoke*, imitative of the cry of the native owl, into *more-pork*. But these are later refinements, equally foreign to primitive man and to the baby.

It is regrettable that our ancestors have not left us earlier records of words of the "bow-wow" type. The *Oxford Dictionary*, the greatest repertory of word-lore that scholarship has ever compiled, can trace *bow-wow* itself no farther back than the 16th century, with a quotation from Lambarde, the topographical antiquary, 'A dog's barking that soundeth nothing else but baw-waw-waw.' The *baa* of the sheep is recorded at about the same date in the works of Sir Philip Sidney. But, if we could be miraculously transported back a few thousand years and listen to the infant Aryans prattling in the basket-work wains in which they were piled up during the periodical migrations, we should probably catch from their lips something very much like *bow-wow* and *baa-baa* when the flocks came in sight with their canine attendants. A 16th-century English mariner has left on record his method of obtaining beef and mutton from the natives of the West African coast—'We spake to them in the cattle's language, which was never changed at the confusion of Babel, which was *moo* for oxen and kine and *baa* for sheep, which language the people understood very well without an interpreter.'

The baby, like so many other animals, is responsible for his own name. The word is now used in

many European languages as a conscious borrowing from England, the home of baby-worship, or, to use a new word now current, babyolatry. It is obviously imitative of 'the repeated syllabic *ba-ba*, one of the earliest articulate sounds made by infants' (*Oxford Dictionary*). And here it may be noted that among vowels baby prefers *a* and among consonants the easily produced labials *b* and *m*, although, as we shall see, a special type of Aryan baby, or perhaps one of more mature months, succeeded at an early period of history in bringing the point of his tongue against his upper gums so as to produce *n* and *t*. Also baby-speech is always reduplicated. No self-respecting baby has ever been known to speak of a *gee* when he meant a *gee-gee*.

The oldest form we find of *baby* is *baban*, in the 13th century. By the next century this was often reduced to *babe*, the only form found in the Bible, but, at the same period, the diminutive *baby* also became popular and was used by the author of *Piers Plowman*. It is evident that such a word-formation cannot be peculiar to one language. The Gaelic, Welsh, and Irish *baban* may have been borrowed from English, but we must allow an independent origin to the Albanian *bebu*. And, although the European languages as a whole do not show a native word corresponding to *baby*, many of them have used the same speech-element for kindred words, whence our *babble*, infantile utterance, *bauble*, a child's plaything, and *baboon*, a grimacing and gibbering animal. Whatever be the etymological origin of the 'Tower of Babel,' it was understood by the author of

Genesis as connected with the above group of words—‘Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth.’

Just as baby owes his title to his own *ba-ba*, so the *barbarians* were named from an utterance that to the refined Greek ear suggested only an unmeaning reduplicated babble, *bar-bar*. At a much later date Dutch explorers could make nothing but *Hott-en-tot* of the speech of the South African natives. To the English sailor Dampier it suggested rather *Hodma-dod*. One of the earliest travellers to explore the extreme north of Europe opined, in the 16th century, that the *Lapps* were named ‘of their brief and short speech.’

Many years ago *Punch* had a picture of a worshipped baby who, exhorted by one parent to say *d-d-dad*, and by the other to say *m-m-mam*, compromised on *d-d-dam*. The more usual baby-word corresponding to *mamma* is *papa*, *dad* being a variation on another theme that I will mention presently. Or rather, long before baby is at all clear as to the difference between his parents, the reduplications *pa-pa*, *ma-ma* come indifferently to his lips at the most interesting moments of his life, those associated with refreshment.

Thus, in many languages, *papa*, *mamma*, both occur in the sense of ‘breast,’ the former surviving in English in the archaic *pap* of the Bible (*St. Luke* xi. 27), and also in the sense of baby-food, the latter passing from Latin into modern languages as the

recognized scientific name of the maternal breast, and the basis of a whole zoological nomenclature. The *Oxford Dictionary* records *papa* from the end of the 17th century, and *mamma* a hundred years earlier (in Lyly's *Euphues*) ; but we may be sure that both words were often vociferously uttered by hungry babies many centuries before history begins.

We may suppose that baby, as his consciousness developed, shortened his two favourite reduplications into *pa* and *ma*, and that these two syllables went into the melting-pot of speech, acquired terminations, became eventually Greek *patēr*, *mētēr*, Latin *pater*, *mater*, and in the Teutonic branch of the Aryan languages went through consonantal changes resulting for us in *father*, *mother*.

But *papa* has done more than this. It has given a title that many Christians regard as the highest of all earthly dignities. It was natural that the office of the Christian priest should have suggested to the early Church the love and authority of the father. Accordingly we find at an early date the Greek *papas*—that is, *papa*—applied to bishops and patriarchs in Asia Minor, while in the Western Church the Latin *papa* was similarly used. As late as the 7th century this was still a common title of bishops, though from the time of Leo the Great (440-461) it tended gradually to be monopolized by the Bishop of Rome. The Slavs gave the same title to the priests of the Greek Church, and German *pfaffe*, now contemptuous, was also taken from Latin at an early date, *pabst*, pope, representing a later borrowing from Greek. The title *papa*, which the

Venerable Bede applies to Vitellianus, the 'high bishop of the apostolic see,' became by regular phonetic processes the modern English *pope*.

A parallel to *pope* is *abbot*, a title also found in various forms throughout Europe, but belonging originally to Syria. The '*Abba*, Father,' of the Bible (*Romans* viii. 15) is an Aramaic word, found in both Chaldee and Syriac. It is related to the Arabic *abu*, so common in Arabic personal names, and evidently belongs to the same kind of infantile babble to which we owe *papa*. In the West it gradually rose in the world, like *pope*, until it became the specific title of the father superior of a monastery.

Before touching on other baby reduplications for 'father' there is one more ecclesiastical name to be noted. This is *nun*, from Latin *nonna*, feminine of *nonnus*, a monk. These were borrowed by Church Latin from colloquial Greek *nunnos*, *nunna*, terms of endearment used to elderly persons, whence come also Italian *nonno*, *nonna*, grandfather, grandmother, Sicilian *nunnu*, *nunna*, father, mother, Sardinian *nonnu*, *nonna*, godfather, godmother. The masculine form did not retain the sense given to it in the early Church, but the feminine form is to be found in the languages of all the Christianized nations. In modern Greek *nanne*, *nenna*, mean aunt, and the whole group is of the same baby type as Sanskrit *nana*, mother. The infantile *nanna*, nurse, though not admitted to the dictionaries, is also entitled to rank among the few vocables that have an uninterrupted life of some thousands of years. Our

word *aunt* itself goes back ultimately to the baby-syllable *am*, expressive of affection, whence Latin *amo*, I love, with its numerous derivatives. From this *am* was formed Latin *amita*, for an elderly female relative. This in turn became Old French *ante* (whence our *aunt*), now altered to *tante* as a result of the nursery reduplication *ante-ante*. To the same *am* root belongs German *amme*, nurse, which is Old German *amma*, mamma.

The Sanskrit *tata*, father, is curiously like our *dad*, *daddy*, the former of which is used by Shakespeare (*King John*, ii. 2). The fact that Welsh has *tad*, *dad*, for father, does not point to any borrowing having taken place between the two languages, but merely to a similar natural instinct in English and Welsh babies, not to mention those which stammered so long ago in Sanskrit. *Tata* and *dad* may both represent a variation on the simpler *at*, just as we turn the *Ed* of *Edward* into *Ted*. All the Aryan languages possess a word corresponding in form to our *father*, but it is remarkable that Gothic rarely uses *fadar*, which, as we have seen, represents one of the Teutonic developments from the primitive *pa*. In Gothic, the Lord's Prayer begins, 'Atta unsa thu in himinam,' which, rendered into English, becomes 'Our daddy, thou in heaven.'

The same syllable is found in Latin *atavus*, great-grandfather's grandfather, whence our scientific word *atavism*, used of a throwback to a remote ancestor. To the Gothic *atta* we owe also the famous name *Attila*. We do not know the real name of the grisly King of the Huns, but we may suppose that his

subjects called him by some title meaning 'little father,' the traditional form of address of the Tartar to his ruler, and at one time especially applied to the Tsar of Russia. This Hun title must have been translated by the Goths as *Attila*, a diminutive of *atta*, father. Thus the title of the Scourge of God, as that of the Vicar of God, is ultimately derived from an affectionate gurgle spontaneously produced in the cradle of the prehistoric baby.

CHAPTER VI

ENGLISH PLACE-NAMES

1. *The Place-Names of Northumberland and Durham.* By ALLEN MAWER. Cambridge University Press. 1920.
2. *The Place-Names of Lancashire.* By EILERT EKWALL. Chetham Society. 1922.
3. *English Place-Name Society.* Vol. I. Edited by ALLEN MAWER and F. M. STENTON. Cambridge University Press. 1924.

Part I. i. Methods of Place-Name Study, W. J. Sedgfield ; ii. The Celtic Element, Eilert Ekwall ; iii. The English Element, F. M. Stenton ; iv. The Scandinavian Element, Eilert Ekwall ; v. The French Element, R. E. Zachrisson ; vi. The Feudal Element, James Tait ; vii. Place-Names and English Linguistic Studies, Henry Cecil Wyld assisted by Mary S. Serjeantson ; viii. Place-Names and Archaeology, O. G. S. Crawford ; ix. Personal Names in Place-Names, F. M. Stenton.

Part II. The Chief Elements used in English Place-Names, Allen Mawer.

It would be difficult to mention any branch of philological or historical science which has, in recent years, made such real progress as the study of Place-Names. It is not a new subject. Medieval scholars and chroniclers played with it. Antiquaries of the Renaissance did much useful work, rather marred by their predilection for such etymologies as 'Trent from its thirty tributaries.' Much earlier is Prior Fossour's theory, recorded immediately after the battle of Nevill's Cross (1346), that *Findon* (Durham)

was prophetically named from the *fin donnée* to the war. Camden published in 1586 his *Britannia*, a monumental survey which no modern writer on the subject can afford to neglect. This was ‘Englished’ in 1610 by Philemon Holland, and few volumes supply more delightful browsing for the reader who knows something about our country-side. The serious philological study of the subject, as far as this country is concerned, began with Isaac Taylor’s *Words and Places*, first published in 1864 and frequently reprinted up to the present day. Of this epoch-making work no student can speak without deep respect, though modern scholarship must smile at the attempt of one man to survey the world from China to Peru. It is now recognized that results that will stand the test of time and criticism can only be obtained by the collaboration of those skilled in many branches of knowledge—Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, Anglo-French, archaeology, history, topography, even botany and geology, and finally, aeronautic photography as practised by Mr. Crawford. Even with such collaboration there will always remain that last indecipherable element of the palimpsest, the pre-Celtic—

‘ Only perchance some melancholy stream
And some indignant hills old names preserve,
When laws and creeds and people all are lost.’

The many recent monographs on individual counties—inaugurated in 1901 by Skeat’s *Place-Names of Cambridgeshire*—often suffer from lack of such collaboration. A problem that is insoluble in one county may become easier when the material

of the surrounding region has been analysed. A theory based on an isolated form may be invalidated by the evidence of similar forms occurring elsewhere. In Wyld and Hirst's *Place-Names of Lancashire* (1911) *Hambleton* is explained as containing a supposed Anglo-Saxon personal name Hamela. Professor Mawer, in a paper read to the British Academy (Jan. 26, 1921), pointed out that the same element occurs in about a dozen place-names scattered about England, and practically always in combination with the ending *don*, a hill. We can hardly suppose that an Anglo-Saxon of conjectural existence, and bearing an otherwise unrecorded name, spent his life in going about the country annexing hills. Evidently we have to do with a descriptive epithet related to Middle High German *hamel*, steep, abrupt cliff, and to Anglo-Saxon *hamelian*, to mutilate. The exact English sense can only be determined when all the *Hambletons*, *Hambletons*, etc. have been topographically described.

By the year 1924 no fewer than twenty-four of our counties had been dealt with, some by more than one hand. To these volumes, varying considerably in fullness, method, and resultant value, may be added such more general surveys as Johnston's *Place-Names of England and Wales* and McClure's *British Place-Names in their Historical Setting*, in both of which much useful material is accumulated. Special problems of Place-Name study have been handled by Scandinavian scholars in Ekwall's *Scandinavians and Celts in the North-West of England*, Lindkvist's *Middle-English Place-Names of*

Scandinavian Origin, and Zachrisson's *Anglo-Norman Influence on English Place-Names*. Last, but not least, may be mentioned various articles and reviews from the hand of that great scholar, Henry Bradley, who unfortunately did not live to pen the general introduction to the subject which he had promised for the new-born English Place-Name Society.

One result of all this spade-work is that the more recent books devoted to particular counties, such as those of Mawer and Ekwall, show a great advance both in fullness and certainty. Professor Mawer deals with about 2,000 Northumberland and Durham names, including some which have now disappeared from the map. He is handicapped by the poverty of the region in early records and has further limited himself by the wise decision to say nothing about names of which no forms are extant previous to the year 1500. Both he and Professor Ekwall have combined the phonological and topographical methods, i.e. they have not followed the severe phoneticians, who sometimes give, from purely linguistic data, solutions which are obviously at variance with the physical features described.

The Place-Names of Northumberland and Durham are predominantly Anglian. The characteristic Scandinavian endings, such as *-by*, *-garth*, *-toft*, *-thwaite*, are almost entirely absent, and the use of the Scandinavian *beck* for a stream is a comparatively recent introduction from Yorkshire, substituted in some cases for an earlier *burn*. The

river-names, except for small streams, are, as usual, Celtic. One really old *beck* is *Bulbeck*; but the curious explanation is that it represents *Bolbec*, at the mouth of the Seine, the home of a Norman knight to whom Henry I gave a Northumbrian barony. Thus the Old Norse word reached England in this case by a very roundabout route. A few examples may be taken at random to illustrate the difficulty of the task which Professor Mawer has so successfully carried out and the impossibility of explaining Place-Names by their modern forms. A local legend derives *Jesmond* from 'Jesus mound.' It really means the mouth of the river Yese (now the Ouseburn). The second element of *Overgrass* was originally *gares*, the plural of *gare*, triangular patch, which we have in the southern *Kensington Gore*. *Filbert Haugh* was once, incredible though it may seem, *Hildeburh's Haugh*, and *Dingbell Hill* is simply a corruption of *Thingwell*, representing the familiar Old Norse *thing-vellir*, fields of assembly, whence we have also *Thingwall* (Chesh.), *Dingwall* (Ross), and the *Tynwald Hill* of the Isle of Man. It is not likely that a Scandinavian *thing* was ever held on *Dingbell Hill*. More probably its shape reminded some Scandinavian settler of a conference hill in his home-land. *Haltwhistle* is an odd compound of Old French *halt*, high, and Anglo-Saxon *twisla*, a fork in a road or stream. *School Aycliffe* bears the name of the Viking chieftain Scula, to whom King Rægenwald gave part of the patrimony of St. Cuthbert. *Westernhope* was a *hope*, or small upland valley, from which *whetstones* were excavated.

In the Place-Names of Lancashire Professor Ekwall has to deal with much more heterogeneous origins. Both Celtic and Scandinavian names are numerous in certain localities. It is perhaps for this reason that the author has grouped his material under the various hundreds of the county, instead of adopting the purely alphabetical arrangement. Interesting names which are probably Celtic are *Haydock*, from Welsh *haidd*, barley, with the suffix which appears in Welsh as *-og* (cf. Welsh *Clynnog*, from *celyn*, holly, and *Ceirchiog*, from Welsh *ceirch*, oats), and *Culcheth*, containing Welsh *cil*, back, and *coed*, wood. The latter name is thus identical with *Kilquite* and *Colquite* (Cornwall) and *Cilcoit* (Monmouth). The Scandinavian element is chiefly Norwegian, the Danish *thorp* being rather rare in comparison with the most familiar Norwegian endings. One of the most interesting of the latter may be called Celto-Scandinavian, viz. the *-ergh* or *-argh* so strongly exemplified in the county and often reduced to *-er* (*Anglezark*, *Grimsargh*, *Docker*, *Salter*). This is Irish *airghe*, a shieling or a pasture, brought over by Vikings who had been settled in Ireland long enough to adopt the Celtic word. It is curiously disguised in *Arkholme*, earlier *Erghum*, which, like *Lathom* (from Old Norse *hlatha*, a barn), is simply a dative plural. Professor Ekwall does not settle the long dispute as to the origin of *Liverpool*, though he puts forward tentatively the new theory that the first element may be related to Anglo-Saxon *lifrig*, clotted. His book is undoubtedly the most masterly contribution that has yet been made, not only to

the topographical history of Lancashire, but to the whole subject of Place-Name study.

The first issue of the *Transactions* of the English Place-Name Society represents the sort of collaboration that all students now find to be necessary, if solid results are to be obtained. The contributions will vary in attraction according to the taste of the reader. Many will turn at once to the fascinating article on *Archaeology* by Mr. Crawford, whose photographs taken from the air have revealed much that is invisible to those who remain on the ground. The pure philologist will be chiefly allured by Professor Ekwall's two monographs on the Celtic and Scandinavian elements. The interested amateur will begin with Professor Sedgefield's *Methods of Place-Name Study*, and then, if still interested, will probably turn to Part II of the *Transactions*, in which he will find the vocabulary of this language, which we all speak familiarly without understanding it.

If we miss anything in the *Transactions*, it is a more simply framed account of the way in which, so far as our records go, Place-Names came into being, a kind of 'talk' which would reach the general public more certainly than these learned essays addressed to the converted.

It is recognized that, generally speaking, the names of our hills and rivers are of Celtic or pre-Celtic origin, while the homesteads from which the villages and towns developed were named by the Anglo-Saxons or Scandinavians. Very often the first element of a Place-Name is that of the river on which

the town or village stands, e.g. *Doncaster* is the *ceaster* (Latin *castra*, a camp) on the river Don. But many names of smaller streams are what is called back-formations, i.e. the river has been renamed from the town. The classic example is the *Cam*, originally the *Granta*, which gave its name to *Granta-bridge*, *Gantabridge*, *Cantabridge*, *Cambridge*. *Chelmsford* now stands on the *Chelmer*, but the town took its name from an Anglo-Saxon Ceolmær, who perhaps lived by the ford and charged a toll for its use. *Arundel* appears to be the dell by the *Arun*, but its earliest form, *Harehunedal*, suggests that it was named from the horehound (Anglo-Saxon *harehune*), which grows plentifully in the neighbourhood. Thus *Chelmer* and *Arun* are comparatively recent back-formations. Still more fantastic is the origin of a little Lancashire brook called the *Tawd*. This is a back-formation from *Tawdbridge*, a spot once called, before the bridge was built, *Taldeford*, which is simply Lancashire for ‘ the old ford.’

The great majority of Place-Names contain a word denoting homestead, such as *ton* (Anglo-Saxon *tun*, enclosure, ‘ town ’) and *ham* (Anglo-Saxon *ham*, home), or a word applied to some common and important natural feature, such as *ley*, open country (Anglo-Saxon *leah*) and *ford* (Anglo-Saxon *ford*). As early as 1605, Verstegan, writing on surnames derived from places, notes that—

‘ In foord, in ham, in ley, and tun,
The moste of English surnames run.’

The series of meanings belonging to the suffix *-ley* might serve as a text for a sermon on the cultural

development of our forefathers. Etymologically akin to Latin *lucas*, a grove, it originally meant woodland. In the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle the *Andredesweald* is also called the *Andredesleage*. *Oakleys* and *Ashleys* are still common enough. *Bromley* and *Bentley* show the transition of sense to a heathy or rushy waste. In *Shipley* (sheep) and *Horsley* the *ley* has become pasture-land. In *Wheatley* it was been brought to a high state of cultivation.

To these topographical terms was prefixed a first element, either descriptive, e.g. *Newton*, *Oldham*, *Thornley*, *Twyford* (Anglo-Saxon *twi*-, double), or giving the name of the owner, male or female, e.g. *Alfriston* (Alfric's town), *Abram* (Adburga's home). The whole system of nomenclature shows the peasant's eye for natural features and the respect for property which the descendants of the Anglo-Saxons have not yet quite lost. Characteristic is the *Threap*- of *Threapland*, *Threapwood*, which, coming from Anglo-Saxon *threapian* (to scold, bicker), was prefixed to debatable ground. Professor Mawer is inclined to see something of the same kind in the very common, but unexplained, *Bicker*- (*Bickerton*, *Bickerstaff*, etc.). In the regions where we find the Scandinavian *-by*, *-thorp*, *-thwaite*, etc., Norse names occur, e.g. *Aislaby* (Aslac's farm), *Gunthwaite* (Gunhilda's clearing), and, later on, the Normans occasionally contributed to such formations, e.g. *Ponsonby* (Poinson), *Royston* (Rohesia). The Normans are also responsible for a few Place-Names which show a finer sense for the landscape

than was possessed by the Anglo-Saxons or the Norsemen. Such are *Belassis*, *Belchamp*, *Beaulieu*, *Beaumont*, and *Beaurepaire*, the last of which has become *Belper* in Derbyshire, *Barripper* in Cornwall, and *Bearpark* in Durham. It is true that *Fair-* is not uncommon, but, in Professor Ekwall's opinion, it referred originally to the excellence of the soil rather than the beauty of the prospect.

The Anglo-Saxons were fond of putting a preposition before Place-Names. Bede calls *Ripon* 'locus qui vocatur in Hrypum' and a charter of 758 speaks of the 'viculus qui nominatur æt Secgesbearwe.' Hence many of our modern Place-Names are from the Anglo-Saxon dative, e.g. *-bury* is the dative of *-borough*, Anglo-Saxon *burh*, fortified dwelling; *Newnham* is Anglo-Saxon æt *thæm niwan hame*, *Lytham* means at the hill-sides (Anglo-Saxon *hlith*), *Cotton*, at the *cotes* (Anglo-Saxon *cot*), etc. Sometimes the favourite preposition *at* has adhered, e.g. *Tipton* in Cornwall was once 'at Upton.' In other cases the following word has been robbed of its initial, e.g. *Elstree* is for older *Telstree*, originally 'Tidulf's tree.' Somewhat similar to the last phenomenon is the loss of *th-* in the Yorkshire *ridings*, properly *thridings*, or third parts, the initial having adhered to the final of the words North, East, West. When *at* was used with the feminine of the definite article, an unoriginal *r-* has sometimes been prefixed to the following name. Thus Middle English *at ther ee*, for Anglo-Saxon *at thære ea*, at the water, became separated into *at the ree*, whence the common river-name *Ree*,

while *River* (Sussex) represents *at ther yver*, from Anglo-Saxon *yfre*, which perhaps means edge. *The Ede Way* (Bucks) is folk-etymology for *Thedeway*, Anglo-Saxon *theodweg*, highway (from *theod*, people), a compound of the same type as *herepæth* (army path), which survives in the surname *Herepath*.

These last two examples remind us that there are some Place-Names which represent early compounds of a rather more picturesque type than those already mentioned. *Morpeth* is the murder-path; *Hesketh* or *Hesket* is Old Norse for a race-course; *Hardhorn* (Lancs) and *Hordron* (Yorks) are Anglo-Saxon *hord-ærn*, hoard-house, i.e. treasury; *Anstey*, Anglo-Saxon *anstig*, one path, was apparently a stronghold that could only be approached in single file; *Emmott* (Lancs) is Anglo-Saxon *ea-gemot*, water-meet; *Fawler* (Oxon) is from Anglo-Saxon *fagan-flor*, variegated floor, and a Roman villa with a tessellated pavement has been unearthed near the village. We know from *Beowulf* that the Anglo-Saxons regarded such floors as particularly splendid. Camden, writing of Circencester, remarks, 'that it was a famous place, the Roman coines, the checkerworke pavements, and the engraven marble stones that now and then are there digged up, doe evidently testify.' *Plaistow*, play-place, probably commemorates the scene of athletic sports or dramatic performances. It is curious that, except in this rather frequent compound (and also in *Chepstow*, from Anglo-Saxon *ceap*, market), *-stow* usually

occurs in compounds that suggest a religious origin, e.g. *Godstow*. *Osterley* contains Anglo-Saxon *eowestre*, sheep (ewe) -fold. The Anglo-Saxon *cristes mæl*,¹ cross, literally Christ mark, gave its name to a ford of the Wiltshire Avon, where grew up a village, the name of which is now twisted into *Christian Malford*, while another perversion of it is seen in *Kismeldon Bridge* (Devon).

Some names are even more fantastic. The oldest form of *Gateshead*, as recorded by Bede, shows the name to have been 'goat's head.' It may be a mistranslation of some Celtic name, but Dr. Bradley was of opinion that such names may point to a custom of setting up the head of an animal, or a representation of it, on a pole, to mark the meeting-place of the hundred. The Northumbrian hamlet *Hartside* is also an original 'hart's head'; but *Hawkshead* (Lancs) was the *set*, or shieling, of a Norseman named Haukr. What are we to make of *Halifax*, which means 'holy head of hair,' with the same Anglo-Saxon *feax* which survives in the surname *Fairfax*? Does it refer to some sacred relic deposited in the Church of St. John the Baptist, which was dedicated c. 1100, or is it a perversion of some earlier name of which we have no record? This is one of many problems which the Place-Names Society will perhaps solve.

When we come to farmsteads of later naming, we sometimes find curious examples of what may be called the *Starve-Crow* type, a name exemplified in most counties, and probably applied to the kind

¹ Cf. German *denkmal*, monument.

of soil to which we owe the earlier *Unthank*, found in most of the northern counties. *Starvhall Farm*, near Drayton (Middlesex), is *Starveall* on the Ordnance Map of 1862. *Mockbeggar*, often occurring in the works of Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, is a common farm-name in Kent and Sussex. *Snape Gate*, near South Bedburn (Durham), is shown by Professor Mawer to be perverted from *Snape Guest*, a name of which he has unearthed three other instances. Here we have an old word, related to *snub*, and still meaning, in northern dialect, to stint.

Some of the widespread compound names raise questions that interest the student of social history. It is no longer believed by competent scholars that the Anglo-Saxons exterminated all ancient Britons who did not take refuge in the recesses of Wales and Cornwall. The fact that Anglo-Saxon *wealh*, Briton, Welshman, also means slave, a man whose weregild was half that of a free-born Englishman, suggests that the survivors were reduced to a servile condition. The country is full of *Waltons*, *Walcotts*, *Walworths*, of which the first element is usually the genitive plural *weala*, but the exact interpretation is a matter of doubt. Were these names given to communities of the original inhabitants, or do they simply indicate the residence of serfs belonging to a manor? Again, what is the exact sense of the *Carltons* and *Charltons* scattered all over the north and south respectively? The *ceorl* was the man of peasant class, intermediate between the noble-born *eorl* and the servile *theow*. If the compound *ceorla-tun* had a precise social meaning, how is it that in a solid

block of six eastern and east-midland counties not a single example of the name is found? *Buckland*, of which the gazetteer shows thirty-three examples, is usually Anglo-Saxon *bocland*, i.e. land granted by 'book' or charter. Why are there no Bucklands farther north than mid-Lincolnshire? Does *Burton* always imply the existence of a fortified homestead, a *burh-tun*, or were some of the Burtons so named because built near ancient earthworks due to the predecessors of the Anglo-Saxons? Similarly, is *Wickham* usually the home established near a *wick*, i.e. a Roman *vicus*? What is the meaning of the mysterious *dray* which we find in more than 40 *Draycotts*, *Draytons*, etc., of the midlands and the south, and why is it entirely absent from the north? Were all the *Prestons*, *Prescotts*, and *Prestwicks* inhabited by priests, owned by them, or did they contribute towards some ecclesiastical endowment? Questions such as these can only be solved by a complete survey of the material for the whole country.

Every explorer of rural England knows that the accepted spelling of a name is often but a poor guide to its local pronunciation. *Slaithwaite* (Yorks), i.e. sloe thwaite, is locally Slo-at; *Tiddingford* (Bucks), i.e. Tidda's ford, is Tinfoot. *Southwell* (Notts) is still Suthl to everyone in the county, though the porters at the station call out South Well for the information of the unenlightened foreigner. 'Education' and the railway are responsible for the replacement of the old local forms by

pronunciations based on a traditional spelling. Daintry is giving way to *Daventry*,¹ and Sapsworth has quite yielded to *Sawbridgeworth*. He who walks along the Adur² from Lancing to Steyning will pass a hamlet now called by the farm-labourer *Botolphs*, but which the map in Camden's *Britannia* registers as Buttles. In the year 1924 a controversy raged in the *Sunday Times* as to the pronunciation of *Cirencester*. One critic told us that 'the correct pronunciation of *Cirencester* should be in full. It is the locals who abbreviate, sometimes beyond recognition.' This authoritative gentleman ain't arguing, he's a-telling you. His letter also contained information on various other 'corruptions.' These 'locals' again. As a matter of fact this is the sort of thing that the English Place-Name Society wants to know. And it is in a hurry, for the oldest inhabitant is on his last legs and his knowledge will perish with him. Coming generations will no doubt eventually restore the *w* to Chiswick, make Gloucester into three syllables and Shaftesbury into four.

The remoteness of modern forms from the original is due, not only to the wearing-down effect of the

¹ The B.B.C. has ordained that Shakespeare's pronunciation is not good enough—

'How far off is our brother Montague?'—

'By this at Daintry, with a puissant troop.'

(3 *Henry VI*, v, 1)

² Professor Ekwall, in his *English River-Names* (Oxford, 1928), suggests that this name, for the older Bramber, was probably invented by Michael Drayton, whose *Polyolbion* was published in 1612. The early antiquaries are responsible for a good many such sins.

centuries, as exemplified by *Brighton* (Brighthelm's town), *Boston* (Botolph's town), or *Stogursey* (for Stoke Courcy), but also to that queer instinct for giving a familiar sound or look to the unfamiliar, which is called folk-etymology. *Northolt* (Middlesex) has nothing to do with *holt*, a wood. It was formerly *Northall*, as distinguished from *Southall*, the original ending being not *hall*, but the puzzling *healh* (dative *hale*), which place-name investigators explain by the rather vague equivalent 'nook,' and which in the north has become *haugh*. *Bushbury* (Warwickshire) is not connected with a bush, but with a bishop. *Sedgefield* (Durham) looks perfectly simple, but it should be Cedd's Field. *Eastwood* (Notts) is one of the *-thwaites* so familiar to the Lake country, a legacy from the Norsemen, who used it for a clearing, a piece cut off. The final syllable of *Maidenhead* was once *hiith*, *hythe*, a landing-place. This tendency, to corrupt the unfamiliar, dates very far back. *York* can be traced, via *Yorwick*, to Anglo-Saxon *Eoforwic* (8th century), i.e. boar-town, but this is merely a perversion of the British *Eborac*, latinized as *Eboracum* in the Antonine Itinerary, and still surviving in the Archbishop's signature and the Ebor Handicap. The name *Churchill* is sometimes found applied to spots where there is a 'hill,' but no record of a 'church.' The explanation is that the Anglo-Saxons adopted the British *cruc*, a hill, adding to it their own word as the other tended to become unintelligible, and that *cruc* was later confused with Anglo-Saxon *ciric*, church. In *Kirkley* (Northumb.) there has been a double

change, the oldest form being Crike-law, i.e. hill-hill. Such duplication of descriptive words is a common phenomenon. A stock example is *Pendle Hill* for the earlier Pendle or Pen-hill, itself an explanatory duplication of British *pen*, a hill.

The English Place-Name Society dates its official existence from an address delivered to the British Academy (January 26, 1921) by Professor Allen Mawer. Our country, as usual, is a little late in the field. A complete linguistic survey of Norwegian topographical names was begun in 1896. Sweden followed in 1905, Denmark in 1910, the importance of the work in each of these countries being recognized in the useful form of financial support from the State. The Scandinavian countries have nothing approaching the material which lies ready to the hand of the English investigator. In fact, no country in the world possesses records so complete, so abundant, and of such early date as our own magnificent collection of State documents, published and unpublished. The most important are the *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, selections of which have been printed by various scholars and antiquaries, *Domesday Book*, the *Pipe Rolls* of the 12th century, the *Hundred Rolls* of the 13th century, and such great series as the *Charter Rolls*, *Close Rolls*, *Patent Rolls*, *Inquisitiones post Mortem*, etc., which begin about the year 1200. To these national records, of which many more could be mentioned, may be added the innumerable muniments preserved in our ancient boroughs, cathedrals, and country houses. The

harvest is plentiful, but the labourers have hitherto been few, much of the best work having been accomplished for us by Scandinavian scholars. If we may judge by the admirable first fruits produced by the English Place-Name Society, English scholarship will soon have nothing with which to reproach itself in this field of learning.

CHAPTER VII

LONDON STREET-NAMES

MR. MENCKEN,¹ on the subject of street-names in England and America, observes that ' Oxford Street, London, becomes the Bayswater Road, High Street, Holland Park Avenue, Goldhawk Road, and finally the Oxford Road to the westward ; and High Holborn, Newgate Street, Cheapside, the Poultry, Cornhill, and Leadenhall Street, to the eastward. The Strand, in the same way, becomes Fleet Street, Ludgate Hill, and Cannon Street ' (*The American Language*, 2nd ed., p. 358). Very confusing to visitors, whether they come from the United States or from the English provinces, but an inevitable result of the way in which our ancient city has ' growed.' The same phenomenon is to be observed all over Europe, e.g. the long arcaded street which

¹ This short article, inspired by Mr. Mencken's reflections, was only intended to whet the appetite of the devout Londoner. Those who are inclined to pursue the subject further will find much interesting information in Mr. Zettersten's *City Street-Names* (Selwyn & Blount) and Miss Rawlings's *Streets of London* (Geoffrey Bles). For copious early documentary evidence these little books may be supplemented by Harben's *Dictionary of London* (Herbert Jenkins), a monumental compilation left unfinished at the author's death and published posthumously. There is also a bewilderingly complete article on the subject in No. 267 of the *Edinburgh Review* (January 1870). Harben's work contains a very full list of authorities and Miss Rawlings mentions a few more recent works.

forms the backbone of venerable Berne has, if I remember rightly, at least four names at different points. We are a slow-moving race. The Great Fire of London did not seriously affect the general lay-out and nomenclature of the City, and I doubt whether even the final triumph of democracy will succeed in acclimatizing such convenient and rational addresses as 'Corner of Fifth and Forty-eighth.'

As London advances out to the mushroom suburbs, its street-names are apt to reflect the poetic imaginations of the speculative builder, though the first transformation of Oxford Street into Bayswater Road is not without historic interest, for *Bayswater*, still rural in the 18th century, was, in the Middle Ages, Baynard's Watering Place, not a place of resort for tourists and invalids, but a drinking-place for cattle. This Baynard may have been the same great Norman noble of *Domesday Book* whose mighty London castle stood by Thames-side and is still the name of one of the City wards.

As we go east, towards the heart of the City, all the names are historically interesting. *Holborn* was once the 'burn' in the 'hollow,' one of the many streams which intersected old London. Another of them was called *Tyburn*, probably because it ran through a 'tye' or enclosed pasture. Here, until 1783, stood the great gallows called Tyburn Tree. The journey of the condemned criminal from Newgate to Tyburn was described in the 17th century as 'going west.' It was owing to the grisly associations of the name that the name Tyborne began, in the

15th century, to be replaced by Maryborne, now corrupted by way of Mary-le-bourne to *Marylebone*, and perhaps generally misunderstood as 'Mary the good.' *Newgate Street* led through the 'new gate' in the western wall of the City. Like the Parisian Pont-Neuf ('Vieux comme le Pont-Neuf!') this 'new gate' was pretty old, for it is so called in the 12th century and was originally built by the Romans. The famous gaol which bore its name from the 13th century onward underwent several reconstructions before its completion put Tyburn out of fashion as a place of execution. It was finally demolished in 1902.

Cheapside, one of the great shopping streets of the Middle Ages, was *West Cheap* (i.e. West Market) when William the Conqueror arrived, a name which distinguished it from the still existing *East Cheap* on the other side of the City. The *Poultry* reminds us that special trades once congregated, as in fact they still do, in special quarters. We cannot trace this market further back than 1273, but the *Vintry*, where the wine-merchants lived and traded, is recorded a century earlier. *Ironmonger Lane* and *Cordwainer Street*, where dwelt the workers in Cordovan ¹ leather, are equally old. *Paternoster Row*, under the shadow of St. Paul's, was, as early as the 14th century, the habitat of the makers of 'paternosters' or rosaries. Close by are *Amen Corner*, *Ave Maria Lane*, and *Creed Lane*, all probably named

¹ *Cordwainer*, still official for a shoemaker, is Old Fr. *cordouanier*, which, by the illogical influence of folk-etymology, has now become *cordonnier*.

at a later date to harmonize with *Paternoster Row*. Then we have *Milk Street*, *Fish Street*, *Bread Street*, etc., not to mention various *Tenter Streets*, where the clothworkers once stretched their wares on 'tenter-hooks.' These names and dozens of the same type remind us that the City of London, now a vast nest of offices and financial establishments, was once a hive of craftsmen and retail traders. *London Wall*, the *Old Bailey*,¹ and *Barbican*¹ tell us that it was also a medieval fortress.

With *Cornhill* we are back in the days when London had very much the aspect of a small provincial town. Here, says Stow,² a corn-market was held 'time out of mind,' certainly as early as the 11th century and very probably in the time of King Alfred. Leadenhall Market is modern London's 'poultry.' The beef-market was also there in Stow's time, the great cattle-market of *Smithfield* having only in recent times been transformed into a central meat-market. This 'smooth field' (it is called *planus campus* in Fitz-Stephen's 12th-century description of London) is also unpleasantly associated with the burning of Protestants by Catholics and of Catholics by Protestants in the age of the Great and Glorious Reformation. The *Leadenhall*, also

¹ *Bailey* and *barbican* were medieval names for part of a fortress. Both words are etymological puzzles, especially the latter.

² John Stow, author of *A Survey of London* (1598) and of other most valuable archaeological works. It is needless to say that he died in poverty. The *Survey* is reprinted in the Everyman series, and there is a critical edition by Kingsford (Oxford Press).

called *la salle de plomb*, was an old City mansion of the great house of Neville. No doubt it was roofed with lead.

Mr. Mencken's alternative route to the City is via the Strand, which runs parallel with the Thames. The *Strand* was, as its name implies, at one time the shore of the river. This river-path, perhaps the oldest of all approaches to the City, was formerly dotted with noble mansions ; among them was the great hospice of the Templars, whose gardens stretched down to the water-side, from which they are now cut off by the Embankment. It was in the Temple garden, according to Shakespeare,¹ that Somerset plucked the red rose and Warwick the white as emblems of the houses of Lancaster and York. *Temple Bar*, the gate from the Strand into the City, was removed in 1878, but the Lord Mayor still meets the King at this spot, when he bids His Majesty welcome into his civic domain and escorts him to the *Mansion House*.²

The Fleet, or stream, from which *Fleet Street* takes its name, is now converted into a sewer. It was probably the same stream as the 'hollow burn,' so that our bad habit of changing names half-way began quite as early as the 12th century. The famous prison where Mr. Pickwick was incarcerated, and which is mentioned in 1197 as 'Gaiola de Ponte de Fleete,' no longer exists. At the bottom of Fleet

¹ 1 *Henry VI*, ii, 4.

² This special sense only dates from 1739-52, when the present building was put up. Originally a *mansion house* was a country seat. Later it had the special sense of an official ecclesiastical residence.

Street we start up *Ludgate Hill*. Hardly any London name has been so repeatedly and inconclusively discussed. Geoffrey of Monmouth, who died in 1154, ascribes the construction of this London gate to King Lud, the brother of that Cassivelaunus who fought against Julius Caesar; and perhaps we had better leave it at that! Then we come to *Cannon Street*, one of the most extraordinary examples of verbal perversion to be found even in the fantastic history of the London streets. It is a comparatively modern alteration of *Candlewick Street*, but this in its turn is a corruption of the 12th-century *Candlewright Street*, i.e. the street inhabited by the candle-makers.

There are plenty of other London street-names which are not to be interpreted according to their surface meaning. One of the few historical truths which the schoolboy assimilates without difficulty is the fact that the Great Fire of London started in *Pudding Lane* and finally died down at *Pie Corner*. This sounds toothsome, but *Pie Corner* was probably named from an inn called the Pie, i.e. the Magpie, and *pudding* has here its original sense of 'innards,' *Pudding Lane* being so called 'because the butchers of Eastcheap have their scalding-house for hogs there, and their puddings, with other filth of beasts, are voided down that way to their dung-boats on the Thames' (Stow).

Many of the other City 'lanes' bear corrupted names. *Gutter Lane* was in King John's days *God-erum Lane*, possibly named from the famous Danish

opponent (Guthrum) of Alfred the Great. *Leather Lane* was Loverone Lane, from an Anglo-Saxon lady called Leofrun. *Godliman Street*, which turns out of St. Paul's Churchyard, seems very appropriate to the neighbourhood of *Paternoster Row*, etc., but *Godliman* was once the popular pronunciation of Godalming in Surrey, whence came a particular kind of leather known in the Middle Ages as 'godelmyng,' which may account for the name of the street. *Mincing Lane*, now the centre of the tea trade, was Menechine Lane in the 13th century, from Anglo-Saxon *mynece*, the feminine of *munuc*, a monk. It contained some tenements belonging to the nuns of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate.

This is an example of the large ecclesiastical element in the names of London streets. Medieval London was really infested with religious communities. All sorts of friars have impressed their names on the map of the City. There are districts or streets known as *Blackfriars* (Dominicans), *Greyfriars* (Franciscans), and *Whitefriars* (Carmelites); the last-named, on the south side of Fleet Street, was a sanctuary for evil-doers, the Alsatia of Scott's *Fortunes of Nigel*; also *Austin Friars*, i.e. Augustines, and *Crutched Friars*, a minor order wearing a cross or 'crouch.' In *Clerkenwell* was a well which 'took the name of the parish clerks in London, who of old time were accustomed there to assemble and to play some large mystery of Holy Scripture' (Stow). The *Minorities*, near Tower Hill, is named from the Abbey of the Minoresses of St. Mary of the Order of St. Clare, and the *Charterhouse* (French

Chartreuse¹) was the headquarters of the Carthusians, before it became the famous institution, where, as old Fuller says, 'children not yet come to, and old men already past, helping of themselves, have their souls and bodies provided for.'

With the friars go the churches, of which I can mention only a few. *Gracechurch*, which has given its name to an important City artery, has nothing to do with Divine Grace. It was originally known as 'grass-church,' from the local 'grass-market,' once equivalent to the 'hay-market' which has given its name to an important street in the West End. *St. Mary Axe* still possessed in the reign of Henry VIII one of the three axes with which *St. Ursula* of Cologne and her eleven thousand virgins were decapitated. In the name of *St. Mary-le-Bow* or *de Arcubus* is preserved 'bow,' a stone arch, still used for the old gates of some of our provincial towns. In front of *St. Andrew Undershaft* stood the giant 'shaft,' or maypole, which, after a mad sermon preached at *St. Paul's Cross* by a puritan crank, was sawn to pieces and burnt, *temp.* Edward VI. *St. Catherine Cree* is for earlier *St. Catherine Creechurch*, i.e. *Christchurch*, with the same pronunciation that the French give to (Jésus)-Christ. *St. Olave's*, Southwark, was built by a Norse colony. It gave its name to *St. Olave's Street*, which, by the same process that made *St. Audrey* into *tawdry*, and *St. Osyth's Lane*, in the City, into *Sise Lane*, became *Tooley Street*, famous for its three tailors and its great fire.

¹ *La Grande Chartreuse*, near Grenoble, where the order was founded in 1084. The liqueur was originally made by the monks.

Another reminiscence of this Norse colony is the name *English Ground* borne by a lane near the church. The Vikings were not the only founders of foreign colonies in London. Near Smithfield Market is *Little Britain*, where, in the Middle Ages, the Dukes of Brittany and their retinue had residences. *Petty France* in the City, once a French colony, has been swallowed up by New Broad Street, but there is still a *Petty France* in Westminster, near the Broadway. *Petty Wales* has disappeared from Thames Street. As early as the 12th century bankers and money-lenders from Italy settled round the spot now occupied by the Bank of England, and gave their name to *Lombard Street*. *Scotland Yard* is associated with the London residence of the Kings of Scotland, though it no longer occupies the site of that colony. Until the Jews were expelled by Edward I, their ghetto was *Old Jewry*, the 'vicus Judaeorum' which we find mentioned about 1100. Since their return in the days of Oliver Cromwell they no longer live segregated, but they still cluster most thickly in special districts, notably *Houndsditch*, which, in pre-sanitary days, was the place where dead dogs were deposited.

Practically all the names so far mentioned are in or closely adjacent to the City, the original 'square mile,' from which London has extended. Mr. Mencken notes the English use of *place*, *walk*, *passage*, *lane*, and *circus*. The last of these is not a City word and is comparatively modern. Other terms that might be mentioned are *row*, *alley*, *court*, and *yard*, for the numerous little 'backwaters' whose existence

in the City is often hardly realized even by Londoners. Pilgrims to the grave of Bunyan in *Bunhill Fields* cemetery, the '*campo santo* of non-conformity,' pass *Bunhill Row*, said to have been originally Bone Hill, from the cartloads of bones removed thither in 1549 from the charnel-house of Old Saint Paul's. The most famous *alley* in London is *Change Alley*, by the Stock Exchange, the scene of frenzied gambling at the time of the South Sea Bubble. This is known as 'the Alley,' as Scotland Yard is 'the Yard.' *Court* and *yard* are generally applied to small inlets behind old taverns. There are several *Mitre Courts* in the City, each corresponding to a Mitre Tavern, and it will be remembered that Mr. and Mrs. Plornish lived in *Bleeding Heart Yard*, a name not of Dickens's invention, though the place no longer exists. It was in *Fetter Lane*, of which the earliest form (*temp.* Edward I) was *Faitour Lane*, from a Middle English name for a begging impostor, one 'on the make.'

As for *road*, now commonly used for an urban thoroughfare, it does not occur, so far as I know, in the City. *Farringdon Street* only becomes *Farringdon Road* at the point where it crosses the boundary. The sense we now give to the word is no older than Shakespeare. Before his time it meant a 'riding,' often an incursion or inroad (see p. 205). As travellers usually 'rode' in early days, the name was gradually applied to the great arteries which radiated from London into the country, such as the *Old Kent Road*, down which the Canterbury pilgrims travelled, and the *Mile End Road* leading into Essex. It was at *Mile End* that Wat Tyler's

promising career as a social reformer was abruptly terminated. The mention of *road* brings us to the decorative street-nomenclature of the suburbs, with their *avenues*, *crescents*, *circuses*, *terraces*, *gardens*, etc., sprinkled about without any regard to the real meanings of these words. M. André Maurois complains pathetically of the complications of London geography—'A Londres Cromwell Place est une rue, Cromwell Gardens n'est pas un jardin, et Hyde Park Terrace n'est pas une terrasse.'

Avenue is modern in London. The oldest is *St. Bride's*¹ *Avenue*,² at the east end of Fleet Street, constructed in 1825. The first *circus* of houses was built at Bath in the 18th century, and likened by Smollett, in *Humphry Clinker*, to 'Vespasian's amphitheatre turned inside out.' It was also at

¹ In connection with St. Bride (i.e. Bridget) may be mentioned *Bridewell*, from a spring near her church. Here Edward VI founded a hospital, later turned into a 'house of correction' (demolished in 1863), which acquired such fame that *bridewell* became a general term for a gaol, just as *Spa*, in Belgium, has come to mean watering-place.

² For this information I am indebted to Mr. Zettersten, who kindly corrected a misstatement in my original article. *Avenue* has had rather a curious history in English. It was first used in its proper French sense of an approach, especially in military language (see quotation from Johnson's Preface, p. 35). Evelyn appears to have given it the special meaning of a tree-lined drive leading to a mansion, whence the idea of over-arching shade now commonly associated with the word. Just after the World War some politician (? Mr. Lloyd George) spoke of 'exploring every avenue' which might lead to a solution of the Irish problem, since when no public speaker has been able to mention a problem unaccompanied by an avenue—'In the interests of the workers all avenues must be explored to increase inter-Imperial trade' (Mr. Ben Tillett, September 2, 1929).

Bath, the 18th-century focus of fashionable life, that the term *crescent* came into use, to be imitated in less favoured localities. The Royal Crescent, where Mr. Pickwick took the upper part of a house for self and friends, was the scene of Mr. Winkle's adventure with the bloodthirsty Dowler. It is possible that *Adelphi Terrace*, the 18th-century work of Robert Adam and his three 'adelphi,' was the first English *terrace* in the modern and incorrect sense.

In this brief survey the examples, taken almost at random, represent only a microscopic portion of the vast field for etymological investigation offered by London street-names. The great fascination of the 'lure of London' is undoubtedly to be found in the ancient heart of the sprawling colossus, but the outlying parts also contain interesting kernels, old homesteads and landmarks swallowed up by the ever-rolling stream of bricks and mortar. Within a few hundred yards of the house in which I am writing is *Gunnersbury* railway station, linked through the ages with the 'bury,' or manor, of Gunhilda. I do not know who she was, but her name is charming. Over the other side of London lies *Brixton*, which sounds, and is, as commonplace as possible. But it takes its name from 'Brix's stone,' which stood there before the Conquest. Was the stone a sacrificial altar and Brix a heathen priest? It is not at all improbable. Even in names given within historic times London seems to me to surpass all other capitals. What town in the world can boast three such intriguing names as Pimlico, Pall-Mall, and Piccadilly?

CHAPTER VIII

SURNAMES AND THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY

To students of the English language the date of first appearance of such words as are not already recorded in Anglo-Saxon is a matter of considerable interest. The great authority in this matter of chronology is, of course, the *Oxford Dictionary*.¹ But this monumental work has made hardly any use of one of the most valuable sources of information, viz. the surnames of our ancestors recorded in the Government Rolls and in innumerable local documents such as Abbey cartularies, Borough records, Manor Court rolls, etc., of which great numbers have been published by various antiquarian societies. Surnames are now felt to be proper nouns which have no place in a dictionary; but this only applies really to patronymics (*Edwards, Johnson, Dicks*, etc.), or to those taken from the names of countries, counties, towns, and villages (*Welch, Kent, Chichester, Bingham*, etc.). All other surnames originated as descriptions (*Arrowsmith, Baker, Good, Bullock, Partridge, Armstrong, Sheepshanks, Shakespear, Doolittle, Truelove*, etc.) or addresses (*Field, Wood, Athill, Bytheway*,

¹ See p. 41. Formerly known to European scholars as the *N(ew) E(nglish) D(ictionary)*, but now officially called the *O.E.D.*

etc.), and are formed from the everyday colloquial language. If then, we find the name of Alan *le arwesmyth* in the *Close Rolls* for 1288-96, we may conclude that the first *Oxford Dictionary* record for c. 1400 must be at least one century, and probably two or three centuries, too late, as the compound would not be likely to be used as a description or means of identification unless it were a well-understood word of long standing. It is sufficiently clear that any word in general use as a surname must have had a pretty long previous existence in the language.

In this article only one group of surnames is considered, viz. the interesting class of nicknames of compound form. Such names may be (1) descriptive of occupation, e.g. *Bridgman*, *Cartwright*; (2) names of wares which the bearer made or sold, e.g. *Horsnail*, *Whitbread*; (3) verbal phrases descriptive of trade, habit, habitual gesture, etc., e.g. *Boughtflower* (= *bolt*, i.e. sift, *flour*), *Wagstaff*; (4) physical nicknames, e.g. *Broadhead*, *Lightfoot*; (5) descriptive of dress or equipment, e.g. *Broadbelt*, *Longstaff*; (6) animal nicknames, e.g. *Duncalf*, *Woodcock*; (7) descriptive of character, e.g. *Gentleman*, *Merryweather*; (8) from abstract qualities, e.g. *Fairservice*, *Truelove*. There are also a great many miscellaneous compounds which do not fit into this, necessarily rather rough, classification, such as names derived from the vegetable world, e.g. *Peascod*, *Sweetapple*, from coins and money, e.g. *Halpenny*, *Hallmark* (for *half-mark*), and from oaths and exclamations, e.g. *Pardew* (*par Dieu*), *Godbehere*. How such names were acquired is not a question which can be dealt

with here. Those which survive as existing surnames are only a very small proportion, but there are enough of them to give some idea of the extraordinary and fantastic character of Middle English nomenclature. On the other hand, a very large number of compounds which now exist as common nouns only are found as medieval nicknames, and very often, as we shall see, at dates long anterior to the earliest records established by the *Oxford Dictionary*.

I will now quote a few examples from the various classes of compounds, giving the date at which each is found as a surname compared with the date of the first record given by the *Oxford Dictionary* of the same word as a common noun. The material I have before me¹ contains a list of nearly 250 examples which antedate the *Oxford Dictionary* by one century at least, and sometimes by more than four centuries, besides some thousands of compounds of which dictionaries show no record. It should be premised that the great mass of English surnames were the creation of the 12th and 13th centuries (the Anglo-Saxon had usually a single name), and began to become hereditary and fixed from the 14th century onward. Hence, as a general rule, we may assume that any word now well established as a surname

¹ This material consists chiefly of a thesis for which Miss Dorothy Pilkington was awarded in 1920 the M.A. degree of the University of London. The character of the investigation was suggested by me, and I also indicated to Miss Pilkington the chief sources of which she could make use. The results she has obtained seem to me of considerable value for the historical study of our language.

must have been current in English not very long after the Conquest. This may be illustrated by such a name as *Crabtree*, common in the West Riding of Yorkshire. The *Oxford Dictionary* records *crab* (apple), c. 1420, and *crabtree*, c. 1425; but the existence of the latter as a medieval surname suggests that both the compound and the simplex must have been familiar words at least a century earlier. This name is also an example of the impossibility of 'explaining' surnames. Did the first Crabtree obtain his name from the tree near which he lived (cf. *Ash, Thorne*), from his 'vinegar aspect' (cf. *Sweetapple*), or from habitually carrying a crabtree staff (cf. *Hardstaff*)? It is impossible to say which, if any, of these explanations is the true one. The same applies to many of the names dealt with in this chapter. What appears to be an occupative surname may have been originally a nickname given for reasons now unknown, and medieval sobriquets were no doubt often ironical, so that *Makepeace* may have been cantankerous, *Drinkwater* a wine-bibber, *Snowball* a swarthy man, and *Fairweather* a grouser. As the *Oxford Dictionary* has not yet got beyond V, no comparison is possible for the rather numerous compound names in W.¹ For these Stratmann and Bradley's *Middle English Dictionary* may be consulted. This contains, for instance, no record of *wainwright*,² though, judging from its frequent

¹ See P.S. at the end of the chapter.

² This is Anglo-Sax. *wægn-wyrhta*. The *Oxford Dictionary* observes that it 'is not found in Middle English, but its existence is attested by the name *Wainwright*.' It is a common surname

occurrence as a family name, it must have been current English by c. 1300 at the latest. In fact it is well attested as a surname from about that date.

The following are some of the most striking examples of occupative names taken from Miss Pilkington's lists :

OXF. DICT. RECORD.		SURNAME RECORD.
ale-brewer	c. 1510	Cristin le alebrewere (City Letter-books, 1307-27).
anchor-smith	1662	Benedict ankersmith (Norwich Records, 1355).
blacksmith ¹	1483	William blakesmyth (Patent Rolls, 1266-72).
boatman	1513	Gervase the boteman (Patent Rolls, 1313-17).
candle-maker	1611	Theophilus the kandilmaker (Patent Rolls, 1317-21).
cellarman	1658	Walter le celeresman (Coram Rege Rolls, 1297).
charwoman	1596	Alice charwoman (Nottingham Records, 1379).
cheesemonger	c. 1510	Baldwin le chesemangere (Pipe Rolls, 1185-6).
coxswain	1463	John cokeswayne (Patent Rolls, 1327-30).
cornmonger	c. 1515	Peter le cormangere (Pipe Rolls, 1176-7).
cowkeeper	1680	David le cowkepere (Vale Royal Abbey, 1330).
ferryman	1464	Richard le feriman (Lanc. Assize Rolls, 1246-7).
fishmonger	1464	Lawrence le fysshmongere (Close Rolls, 1307-13).

in at least six counties, its chief habitat being apparently Cheshire (see Guppy, *Homes of Family Names*). The name is immortalized by two murderers of considerable distinction.

¹ This may also refer to the smith's complexion ; cf. the name *Brownsmith*. *Greensmith* is the smith on the (village) green.

OXF. DICT. RECORD.	SURNAME RECORD.
foxhunter 1692	William le foxhunte (Patent Rolls, 1258-66).
goldbeater 1415	Robert le goldbeter (Hundred Rolls, 1273).
hunt(s)man 1567	Walter hunteman (Hundred Rolls, 1273).
knifesmith 1738	Adam knyfesmith (Lanc. Assize Rolls, 1285).
shearsmith 1623-4	Geoffrey sheresmyth (Freemen of York, 1391).
stone-hewer 1579-80	John the stoneheware (Gloucester Records, c. 1230).

In addition to the above selection may be mentioned a large number of compounds of *-man* (*inkman*, *mailman*, *leatherman*, *oysterman*, etc.), *-monger* (*buttermonger*, *feathermonger*, *flaxmonger*, *horsemonger*, etc.), *-wright* (*glasswright*, *basketwright*, *kitwright*, *tilewright*, etc.), mostly recorded as surnames some centuries earlier than in the *Oxford Dictionary*.

There are also some archaic titles of interest to the historian and the antiquary. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines the obsolete *borsholder*¹ (recorded 1536) as 'the chief of a tithing or frankpledge; afterwards a parish officer identical in functions with the Petty Constable.' Thomas *le borewesaldre* is in the *Charter Rolls* for 1257-1300. *Frankpledge*² is found in Anglo-French form in Britton (1292). The first English record is 1495, and the sense of

¹ According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, from an unrecorded Anglo-Saxon *borges-aldor*, from *borh* (= pledge, security); 'not connected with *borough*.' The form quoted here rather contradicts this opinion. *Aldor*, from *ald*, old, survives in *alderman*.

² See p. 192.

'one of the mutually responsible members of a tithing' is not found by the *Oxford Dictionary* till 1502. But Robert *le francpledge* occurs in 1237 in *Archbishop Gray's Register*. Even *hayward*, the parish official responsible for fences, etc., recorded by the *Oxford Dictionary* from the *Ancren Riwele* (early 13th century), is taken a little further back by Miss Pilkington, who has found Ricardus *heiward* in the *Pipe Rolls* for 1165-6. Occasionally a name which must have been a familiar trade description has quite escaped the dictionaries. An example is *Leadbeater*, common as a Leicestershire name since the Middle Ages. I imagine the *leadbeater* hammered out the metal to form receptacles; cf. Henry *le pannebetere* (*Leicester Borough Records*).

Surnames taken from names of commodities are not necessarily of occupative origin, but there are strong reasons for believing that this is often the case, e.g. that *Hogsflesh* was the nickname of a pork-butcher, *Horsnail* of a farrier, *Whitbread* of a baker, etc. In the *City Letter-Books* occur the names of Alexander *Fresharing*, fishmonger, William *Duble Harneys*, saddler, etc. Examples of compounds of this kind are :

OXF. DICT. RECORD.		SURNAME RECORD.
barley bread	c. 1320	Josce barlibred (<i>Pipe Rolls</i> , 1184-5).
blanc-mange	1377	Stephen blangmong ¹ (<i>Hundred Rolls</i> , 1273).
butter-kit (= cask)	1567	Robert butrekyde (<i>ibid.</i>).

¹ Not the 'sweet' we are familiar with, but a kind of chicken galantine—'For blank-manger, that made he with the beste' (*Chauc.*, *Prolog.*, 387).

OXF. DICT. RECORD.		SURNAME RECORD.
bread-and-cheese	1589	Robert chesandbred (Patent Rolls, 1330-4).
codfish	1565-73	Thomas cotfich (Hundred Rolls, 1273).
hard-fish (= dried)	1808	Richard hardfyssh (Feudal Aids, 1401-2).
honeypot	1483	John hunypot (Patent Rolls, 1313-17).
horse-nail	1598	William horsnail (Close Rolls, 1234-7).
rye-bread	1597	Adam rybred (Charter Rolls, 1300-26).
small-ware	1617	Robert smalware (Pipe Rolls, 1184-5).

The most picturesque type of compound surname is that formed from a verb accompanied by a noun or an adverb, e.g. *Shake-spear*, *Go-lightly*. Here the comparison with dictionary dates can only be made occasionally, as few of these compounds appear to have got recorded as common nouns, though they swarm in the Middle Ages as surnames, not only in England, but in Continental countries. The list before me includes about a thousand of this class. Here are a few which are registered by the *Oxford Dictionary* as occurring in (mostly archaic) language :

OXF. DICT. RECORD.		SURNAME RECORD.
drinkwater	1641	John drinkwater (Hundred Rolls, 1273).
lickdish (= parasite)	1440	Leofric likedich (Ramsey Cartulary, 1114-19).
makepeace	1516	Gregory makepais (Leicester Records, 1219).
picklock	1553	Thomas pyclok (Patent Rolls, 1338-40).
rattlebag	1728	John ratellebagge (Hundred Rolls, 1273).
scattergood (= prodigal)	1577	Robert scatergod (Cockersand Cartulary, 1200-26).
sparegood (= miser)	1611	Walter sparegod (Hundred Rolls, 1273).
spillcause (= marplot)	1566	Alexander spillecause (<i>ibid.</i>).

To the same class belongs *haphazard*, which, as I have shown elsewhere (*Words Ancient and Modern*, p. 52), is not connected with *hap*, chance, but with the obsolete verb *hap*, to seize or grab. Its earliest known occurrence is as the name of a character in the old play *Appius and Virginia* (1575).

Sometimes a surname of this type throws light on the antiquity of a verb, e.g. the *Oxford Dictionary* does not record the verb to *drain*, in its usual current sense, till 1538, but Simon *draneland* lived in the Cambridgeshire fens in 1273 (*Hundred Rolls*). The colloquial verb to *lump* ('like it or lump it') is recorded for 1577, but Matilda *lumppejoye*, apparently the opposite of the existing *Lovejoy*, is in the *Patent Rolls* for 1307-13. The *Oxford Dictionary* has (1586) the odd compound *break-dance* in the sense of turbulent. William *brekedaunce* is in the *Patent Rolls* for 1330-4. The phrase 'to turn a penny' is first recorded for 1546, but Matilda *tornepeni* is in the *Hundred Rolls*, 1273. The name of Nicholas *turncotel* in the *Ramsey Cartulary*, 1252, where *cotel* is an old diminutive form of *coat*, suggests that *turncoat* itself must be older than the *Oxford Dictionary* record of 1557. The phrase 'to drink at pin,' referring to the pegs which marked the measures in large tankards, is not found earlier than 1655. William *drinkepin* is in the *Ramsey Cartulary*, 1206. Even *farewell*, as the surname of Robert *farewel* (*Close Rolls*, 1242-7), is more than a century earlier than the *Oxford Dictionary* record (1374).

In the list before me are fifty-five compounds of *-head*, some of which, e.g. *Broadhead*, *Whitehead*, are

still fairly common. Few of these are in the *Oxford Dictionary*, though many of the corresponding adjectives are recorded, e.g. *broad-headed* (1530), with which cf. Emma *brodhevid* (*Durham Eyre Rolls*, 1243). It is curious to compare the modern *fathead* (*Oxford Dictionary*, 1842) with John *ffathevit* (*Cockersand Cartulary*, 1220). *Redhead* is common as a surname from the 13th century, though not recorded by the *Oxford Dictionary* till 1664, and Adam *rudipat* (*Fines Rolls*, 1199-1216) is a century earlier than the first hitherto known occurrence of the simple *pate* (c. 1305). *Armful* is not given, in any sense, by the *Oxford Dictionary* till 1579. Adam *fayrarmful* is in the *Lanc. Assize Rolls* for 1246-7. *Body*, in the sense of person (cf. *busybody*), dates from 1279. Eustace *frebodi* is in the *Leicester Records* for 1206-7. Corresponding to the adjectives *leather-mouthed* (*Oxford Dictionary*, 1653), *sweet-mouthed* (*ibid.*, 1611), *fair-haired* (*ibid.*, 1626), *long-legged* (*ibid.*, 1590), *good-hearted* (*ibid.*, 1552), *brown-eyed* (*ibid.*, 1865), we find the names of Alan *lethermouth* (*Patent Rolls*, 1330-4), William *swetemouth* (*Freemen of York*, 1346-7), John *fayerher* (*Patent Rolls*, 1258-66), Geoffrey *langleg* (*Close Rolls*, 1279-88), Geoffrey *godherte* (*Close Rolls*, 1204-24), John *bruneye* (*Patent Rolls*, 1313-17). The first *Oxford Dictionary* record of *flaxen*, applied to the hair, is from Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, iv. 5, 196); but cf. Richard *flaxennehed* (*Hundred Rolls*, 1273), Hugo *flaxenebert*, i.e. beard (*ibid.*).

Of the hundreds of such formations enumerated in Miss Pilkington's thesis, only a very few have

been granted the hospitality of the *Oxford Dictionary*. Here are a few with contrasted dates :

OXF. DICT. RECORD.		SURNAME RECORD.
bullhead	1624	John boleheved (Hundred Rolls, 1273).
(= blockhead)		
giddyhead	1641	William gidyheved (City Letter-Books, 1327-77).
greybeard	1579-80	Richard greyberd (Hundred Rolls, 1273).
pink-eye (pink = narrow)	1575	Henry pinkeneye (<i>ibid.</i>).
meal-mouth (= mealy- mouth)	1546	Henry millemuth (Northumb. Assize Rolls, 1279).
cherry-cheek	1447	William chericheke (Patent Rolls, 1323-7).
sheepshank	1675	Thomas shepeshank (Close Rolls, 1223- 7).
spindleshank	1570	Adam spindelschanke (Norwich Records, 1269).
lightfoot	c. 1440	Boidinus lighfot (Close Rolls, 1224-7).
rawbone	1593	Peter rabayn (Patent Rolls, 1321-4).

Out of a large number of compound costume-names I will take only two obsolete terms familiar to students of Chaucer. Sir Thopas wore 'jambeaux,' i.e. leg-armour, of *quyrboilly*, a material of boiled leather (French *cuir bouilli*), and the Clerk of Oxenford had a threadbare *courtepy*, i.e. short pea (jacket). Both words are a little older than Chaucer. The first is in Barbour (1375), the second in Langland (1362). But William *curbuill* (*Percy Cartulary*, c. 1240) and Henry *curtepie* (*Patent Rolls*, 1258-66) point to a probably much greater antiquity of both.

Among nicknames taken from animals, birds occupy the chief place. Some of the compounds, e.g. *Sparrowhawk*, *Nightingale*, *Woodcock*, are of

Anglo-Saxon origin, but there are also many which appear to be of Middle English formation. The following occur, among others, as surnames :

OXF. DICT. RECORD.		SURNAME RECORD.	
bullfinch	1570	Lawrence bulfinch	(Inquisitiones post Mortem, 1316-27).
kingfisher	c. 1440	Henry le kingesfisscher ¹	(Patent Rolls, 1321-4).
nuthatch	c. 1340	Richard notehach	(Patent Rolls, 1281-92).

The odd character of this type of name is well illustrated by Thomas *gosonthe grene*, i.e. goose on the green (*Norwich Records*, 1289). Names other than those taken from birds which antedate considerably the *Oxford Dictionary* are :

OXF. DICT. RECORD.		SURNAME RECORD.	
bell-wether	c. 1430	Richard bellewether	(Patent Rolls, 1321-4).
church-mouse	1731	Robertus chirchmus	(Pipe Rolls, 1165-6).
hog-lamb ²	1818	Stephen hoglambe	(Patent Rolls, 1313-17).
mouse-hunt (= weasel)	1481	Rogerus mushunte	(Pipe Rolls, 1160-1).
puss-cat ³	1565	Robert pusekat	(Northumb. Assize Rolls, 1256).

Mulligrubs, bad temper or the 'blues,' originally meant something like belly-ache, attributed by our ancestors to the intestinal parasites, 'mouldy grubs,' which preceded the now fashionable streptococci. It was especially used of a disease of dogs, the

¹ This is the older name of the bird—' *Kyngis fyschare* bryde . . . qui eam optime describit et vivit per parvos pisciculos' (*Promptorium Parvulorum*).

² A young sheep before its first shearing.

³ Much older than *pussy-cat*.

'worms.' The first *Oxford Dictionary* record for the word is 1599, but as in Marston's *Dutch Courtezan* (1605) there is a character called *Mulligrub*, 'a sharking vintner,' it is evident that the word must have been in familiar use long before.

From the remaining classes I select a few miscellaneous examples :

OXF. DICT. RECORD.		SURNAME RECORD.	
freewoman	1611	Matilda frewoman (Hundred Rolls, 1273).	
gentleman	1275	Adam gentilman (Domesday of St. Paul's, 1222).	
lady-love	1733	Thomas lavedylove (Lanc. Assize Rolls, 1285).	
penny-father (= miser)	1549	William penifader (Close Rolls, 1288-96).	
penny-man	c. 1440	William peniman (Hundred Rolls, 1273).	
'An impersonation of money, also called Sir Penny' (O.E.D.).			
goodspeed	1526	Radulph godisped (Hundred Rolls, 1273).	
sweet-love	1560	Peter swetlove (<i>ibid.</i>).	
barleycorn	1382	Geoffrey barlicorn (<i>ibid.</i>).	
haycock	c. 1470	Henry haycok (Patent Rolls, 1258-66).	
honeydew	1577	Robert honiedewe (Salisbury Cartulary, 1230-40).	
may-bush	1579	William mabussh (Close Rolls, 1313-18).	
oat-hull (= husk)	1607	William otehule (Pipe Rolls, 1182-3).	
pease-cod	1362	Robert pesekod (Charter Rolls, 1257-1300).	
flint-hard	1594	James flinthard (Hundred Rolls, 1273).	
halfpenny	c. 1330	Simon halpenny (Charter Rolls, 1226-57).	
lodestar	c. 1386	James lodsterre (Hundred Rolls, 1273).	
ninepence	1603	Adam ninepenyz (Bishop Kellawe's Register, 1280-1345).	
plough-day ¹	1550	William plouday (Hundred Rolls, 1273).	
snowball	c. 1400	Pavia snawball (Fines Rolls, 1246-72).	
twopence	c. 1450	Walter twapens (Patent Rolls, 1330-4).	

¹ Also called 'Plough Monday,' the first Monday after Epiphany.

The examples quoted in this short summary are mostly chosen as illustrating a considerable divergence of dates between dictionary records and the proved existence of the compound as a nickname. There are also cases in which a difference of only a century may be very significant. The *Oxford Dictionary* dates *husbandman* from c. 1330; but the name of John *husebundeman* in the Patent Rolls for 1225–32 seems to prove that the compound must have been familiar in late Anglo-Saxon, for no man would be officially described by a word which was not generally intelligible and of fairly ancient date.

P.S.—The *Oxford Dictionary* being now complete (see p. 41), it is possible to supplement the above with a few examples of W compounds. Among occupative names we find *Wainman* (1272–81, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1392), *Waterman* (1226–57, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1392), *Wellmaker* (1296, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1666), *Woodreeve* (1272–81, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1579), *Woolbuyer* (1317–21, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1641), and many others in which the gap is slighter; among commodity-names *Wheatbread* (1239–40, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1377), *Whitefish* (1273–1307, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1461), *Whitemeat*¹ (1302–3, *Oxford Dictionary*, c. 1425). Two animal nicknames, *Wagtail* (1189–90, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1510, the bird), *Wildcat* (1175–6, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1418, the animal), are interesting. The first is recorded as an epithet of an improper lady towards the end of the 16th century, and is also applied by Kent to Goneril's steward,

¹ A general name in Middle English for dairy produce.

' Spare my grey beard, you wagtail ? ' (*Lear*, ii, 2) ; the second is used of a human being, ' wild cat with two legs,' by Thomas Tusser († 1580), i.e. as far as the *Oxford Dictionary* records go. The surname records put them both back three or four centuries. Among physical nicknames we have *Whitehead* (1232-47, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1332), *Whitebeard* (1273, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1450), *Widemouth* (1199-1216, *Oxford Dictionary*, ' wide-mouthed,' 1611), *Wetherhead* (1222, *Oxford Dictionary*, ' a tup or wetherhead,' 1796 ; ' a stupid person,' 1869). There is also an interesting group of descriptive compounds in *well-*, e.g. *well-beaten* (1317-21, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1704), *well-beloved* (1259, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1386), *well-fed* (1272-9, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1366), *well-covered* (1273, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1697), *well-met* (1334-8, *Oxford Dictionary*, 1586). *Weathercock* is recorded by the *Oxford Dictionary*, c. 1300, and first found applied to a changeable person in 1588 '—What plume of feathers is he that indited this letter ? what vane ? what weathercock ? ' (*Love's Labour's Lost*, iv, 1). It is recorded as a surname in the first decade of the 13th century. The earliest *Dictionary* quotation for the unpleasant word *whoremonger* is from Tyndale (1526), but William *le Hormangere* is in the *Close Rolls* for 1296-1302.

To repeat and emphasize what was said at the beginning of this chapter, the medieval surname was not a surname in our sense of the word, but a loosely attached and changeable description, made up from the ordinary spoken vocabulary of the period. The

man who is recorded officially as Richard the Goldsmith or Ricardus Aurifaber was very likely known to his friends as Dick *Short*, Dick *Broadhead*, Dick *Nightingale*, or Dick (at the sign of the) *Rose*, and he might change his name when he changed his residence. In my book *Surnames* (John Murray, 1916) I ventured to say that 'a complete dictionary of English surnames would not only form a valuable supplement to the N.E.D. (the *Oxford Dictionary*), but would in a great measure revolutionize its chronology.' The same is true, in a less degree, of the study of place-names, as has already been shown in the fascinating volumes issued by the English Place-Name Society. In this chapter only one little group of surname phenomena is investigated, but a vast field remains for any student who desires to add to what is already known of the history of our language.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. GAMP AND THE KING'S ENGLISH

THE late W. L. George, in *The Strangers' Wedding*, remarks that Mrs. Groby, who took in washing in the Somers Town region, 'spoke badly, her elder daughter rather uncertainly, her youngest quite well—too well.' Which, being interpreted, means that Mrs. Groby spoke rich Cockney, perhaps with a subconscious tinge inherited from rural ancestors, while her elder daughter, after having her language standardized at the board-school, was relapsing into the freer and more natural speech of the factory and the workroom, and the youngest, speaking board-school English pure and simple, regarded her mother's modes of expression with undisguised contempt. Now I would not be thought lacking in respect for board-school English. We are all being standardized now, and the general adoption of an artificial and historically unjustified pronunciation of our language is only one step in the process which may eventually lead to the ideal reform recently 'demanded' by a Women's Labour Congress, viz. the universal adoption of Esperanto. A Board of Education Report (1920) on the teaching of English, which attracted much attention, proclaimed that the business of the elementary school is 'to teach all its pupils who either speak a definite dialect, or whose

speech is disfigured by vulgarisms, to speak standard English,' for 'if the teaching of the language were properly and universally provided for, the difference between educated and uneducated speech, which at present causes so much prejudice and difficulty of intercourse on both sides, would gradually disappear.'

Standardization usually results in mediocrity, and, though the present movement of the spoken language is, conventionally speaking, upward, it is hardly likely that we shall ever witness the phenomenon of the Labour member rising diffidently in the House and expressing in a Balliol voice his courtly criticisms of the previous speaker's views. For the Balliol voice, like other extremes of dialect, will have been standardized away by the force of 'mass production.'

It is true that the Report has a kindly word for dialect—'We do not, however, suggest that the suppression of dialect should be aimed at, but that children who speak a dialect should, as often happens, become bi-lingual, speaking standard English too. Every dialect has, for those who have been brought up to speak it, intimate associations of its own, and, side by side with standard English, dialect will probably persist and be used in the playground and the street. In many cases, indeed, it will deserve to persist, on account of its historic interest.' If this pious aspiration is not fulfilled—as, of course, it will not be—no doubt the Board of Education will deeply sympathize, 'holding its pocket-handkerchief before its streaming eyes.'

There are probably still many people who believe

that all dialect, whether of the rustic labourer or the old-fashioned Cockney, is 'corrupt English.' There are certainly very few who realize that the exact opposite is the case, and that 'standard English' is 'corrupt dialect.' Of all those historic dialects which still distinguish, to a greater or less degree, the speech of most Englishmen, none is of such interest as Cockney, that noble blend of East Mercian, Kentish, and East Anglian, which, written by Chaucer, printed by Caxton, spoken by Spenser and Milton, and surviving in the mouths of Sam Weller and Mrs. Gamp, has, in a modified form and with an artificial pronunciation, given us the literary English of the present day.

Unfortunately its written records are few. Our modern pronunciation is largely the result of spelling, and spelling always tends towards the conventional and pedantic, the very process of learning to read and write involving inevitably the acceptance of much that is traditional or accidental. The scholar is always corrupting the approximately phonetic spelling of earlier times, when, in Johnson's words, 'every penman endeavoured to express as he could the sounds which he was accustomed to pronounce or receive, and vitiated in writing such words as were already vitiated in speech.' In using the word 'vitate' Johnson is begging the question. Changes in pronunciation are gradually brought about by phonetic laws the operation of which, unless thwarted by pedantic interference, is almost unfailing. If the old-fashioned *weskit* for 'waistcoat,' a pronunciation given as late as 1859 in Worcester's

Dictionary, is 'vicious,' it would only be fair to describe *joy* as a 'vicious' pronunciation of the Latin *gaudium*.

Although medieval spelling is, generally speaking, more phonetic than that of the present day, much caution has to be observed in drawing from it conclusions as to pronunciation. Men like Chaucer, familiar with Latin and French, were unconsciously influenced by the traditional spelling of words derived from those languages. The same applies to Caxton and to the later printers, who gradually evolved the system now in use, a system which makes the relation, or want of relation, between our spelling and our pronunciation the despair of the foreign student of English. It is upon this artificial system of spelling that our artificial pronunciation is based.

Roughly speaking, it may be said that, before the age of Elizabeth, no one was interested in English as a language. The vernacular was simply a means of communication, not an artistic instrument. With the great Elizabethan age came the creation of a literary medium gradually departing from everyday speech, together with a conscious attitude towards language as such. The writers of that age show no trace of dialect, except for an occasional provincialism such as Shakespeare's Warwickshire *boltered*, because the printers reduced to almost modern uniformity any unusual spellings which might have revealed the writer's own pronunciation. That the speech of men of rank showed at that period great variation is beyond dispute. The Welsh jargon of

that fine swashbuckler Sir Roger Williams, perhaps the original of Shakespeare's Fluellen, is an extreme case, but we have contemporary evidence for the fact that the brilliant Raleigh spoke broad Devonshire to the end of his life ; and it is not likely that the language of Drake and Hawkins differed materially from that of a present-day Brixham trawler.

With the next century begins some sort of movement towards standardized pronunciation, a movement reflected in the works of the professional orthoepists, of whom the first in date is Gill (1621) and the last is Smart (1836), the most instructive for purposes of comparison with the speech of our great-grandfathers being Walker, whose *Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791), long a standard authority, marks approximately the date at which educated speech had been more or less standardized and assimilated to the literary language. Although the general tendency of these theorists is in the direction of that 'regular and solemn' pronunciation which Johnson preferred to the 'cursory and colloquial,' we are often surprised to find them recommending what are now considered vulgarisms. Mrs. Gamp described herself as a *nuss*, a pronunciation prescribed by an orthoepist of 1724, and quite familiar, up to the end of the 19th century, among the less educated inhabitants of London. The reader will remember that W. S. Gilbert's eccentric sugar-broker—

' Braved the gay and guileless laugh
Of children with their nusses,
The loud, uneducated chaff
Of clerks on omnibuses.'

Walker gives *ojus* or *ojeus* for 'odious,' and observes with regard to 'asparagus' that '*sparrowgrass* is so general, that *asparagus* has an air of stiffness and pedantry.' But, during the 19th century, and especially since the Elementary Education Act of 1870, Johnson's dictum that 'the most elegant speakers deviate the least from the written word' has almost assumed the validity of a fulfilled prophecy. My own students usually pronounce the *t* in *often*, and insist on making *forehead* rime with 'hoar head,' although I periodically remind them that—

'There was a little girl, who had a little curl
Just in the middle of her forehead;
And, when she was good, she was very, very good,
But, when she was bad, she was horrid!'

One complete change that has taken place in my own time is in the London milkman's announcement of his wares. When I was a boy, he still shouted the West Saxon *meolc*, but two generations of elementary education have converted him to the Mercian *milk*.

What we regard as vulgarisms are usually older pronunciations which have been gradually expelled by the printed word. *Waps* is not a corruption, but the legitimate descendant of Anglo-Saxon *wæps*, and *ax*, Anglo-Saxon *acsian*, was, up to the 16th century, in regular literary use—'Axe, and it shal be geven you' (Tyndale, *St. Matt.* vii. 7). To come to more recent times, Byron rimes *vase* with *face* and *place*. This was also the pronunciation of my

own father, who died at a very advanced age in 1920, and it is still usual in the United States. Forty years ago one still heard occasionally 'vawse,' which Walker describes as 'too refined for the general ear.' The current pronunciation is due to so many people having 'done' French at school; but, to be logical, we should also speak of the 'bahze' of a triangle. For *cucumber* Walker gives the two pronunciations *coocumber* and *cowcumber*, with the comment, 'It seems too firmly fixed in its sound of *cowcumber* to be altered, and must be classed with its irregular fellow esculent *asparagus*.' In 1836 Smart tells us that 'no well-taught person, except of the old school, now says *cowcumber*.' My grandfather, a country schoolmaster born in 1807, was, I believe, well-taught, but he certainly belonged to the old school in the matter of '*cowcumbers*,' though Mrs. Gamp's regular use of that form shows that Dickens regarded it as old-fashioned in London by 1842.

Just as the sound of *vase* has been altered in recent times, so the older *idee*, from French *idée*, was reconstructed by those who had 'done' Latin or Greek. Lydgate rimed *idee* with *key* long before we have any literary record of *idea*. The vulgar *airy* is also much older than the restored *area*. I can remember hearing old men talk of having served in *Indy* or *Chiny*, and we still use the former in the plural when we speak of the *Indies*. The alternative name for Crete is now Candia, but an older form survives in the name of the plant *candy-tuft*, brought from that island. *Guinea*, whether for the country

or the coin associated with it, has adopted a 'learned' form, but kept its old pronunciation. Lady Wentworth writes, early in the 18th century, to her son, Earl Strafford, ambassador at Berlin, 'I wish that you may be in as great favour with this Queen of Prushee¹ as you was with the last,' and promises that, during his absence, she will break none of his *chyney*. We still sing songs of *Araby*, a form that antedates *Arabia* by four centuries.

The mention of Lady Wentworth (a dear old soul, by the way) brings me to my thesis, which is that Mrs. Gamp, who must have learnt to talk in the generation which preceded the publication of Walker's *Dictionary*, spoke English very much after the fashion of a lady of quality of 1700-50. If anyone doubts this, let him compare—'The very last case as ever I acted in ; which it was but a young person' (Mrs. Gamp) ; 'Mr. Arundell is an extreem kynde husband, as ever I see' (Lady Wentworth) ; 'A back gate ; which I forget the street's name it goes into' (Lady Wentworth).

The two ladies agree in pronouncing *-ure* as *-er*. This was once universal, and we still have *fritter* from French *friture*, *tenter*-(hooks) from French *tenture*, and several other examples. In *figure* we have restored the spelling, but kept the natural sound, though it seems to be a literary convention for the humorist to indicate uneducated speech by the orthography 'figger,' which is just as absurd as

¹ The 16th-century adventurers who started the Muscovy Company describe the Tsar as the Emperor of 'Rushye.'

'sossidge,' 'wimmin,' 'tuppence-hapenny,' 'pleece-man,' approximately phonetic forms which would rejoice the heart of a 'simplified speller.' Are we to understand that the humorist himself habitually pronounces 'saw-sage,' 'woe-men,' 'two-pence-half-penny'? Even so acute an observer as Dickens makes merry over the fact that Mrs. Gamp pronounced *police* as though it were the name of a fur garment. To return to the matter of *-ure*, Mrs. Gamp addresses Mrs. Prig in the very terms which Lady Wentworth habitually applies to her son the Earl, viz. 'dearest creetur'; and, if Mrs. Gamp speaks of the 'torters of the Imposition,' Lady Wentworth writes that her dying lapdog 'never offered to snap at anybody in its horrid torter.' The following lines, dating from 1728, illustrate a pronunciation which still survives in Anglo-Irish¹:

' How cruel are the traitors
 Who lie and swear in jest
 To cheat unguarded creatures
 Of virtue, fame and rest !'
 (Gay, *Beggar's Opera*)

The fact is that, just as the dress fashions of humbler folk once followed, at a considerable interval of time, those of the wealthier class, so their speech used

¹ It is a common phenomenon that a language isolated from its original source remains archaic. The earlier pronunciation of modern English cannot be thoroughly studied without recourse to Anglo-Irish. For *tea* the Irishman says *tay*, like Pope, who rimes it with *obey*; for *sea* he says *say*, like Cowper, who rimes it with *survey*.

to reproduce the fashionable pronunciation of preceding generations. Mrs. Gamp talked like an early Georgian duchess and Sam Weller like a town 'blood' of the same period.

For Mrs. Gamp's 'fiery furnace' and 'Jonadge's belly' I am unable to supply an aristocratic 18th-century parallel, but we have two modern words the alteration of which shows the same tendency. One is the nautical to *forge* (ahead), for earlier *force*. The other is *trudge*, which I have shown elsewhere to be a development of *truss*, the Shakespearean 'trudge and pack' corresponding to the earlier 'truss and pack' (*Words Ancient and Modern*, pp. 134-8).

From what has already been said, it will be clear that literary records are a very insufficient guide to the history of English pronunciation. Fortunately we have other sources, the most valuable of which is the great mass of private correspondence, from the *Paston Letters* (1422-1509) onward, preserved in the stately homes of England, and given to the world from time to time by the Government Commission on Historical Manuscripts or by private editors and antiquarian societies. Of course we should like earlier and humbler records. Mérimée says somewhere that he would cheerfully give up Thucydides for the authentic memoirs of Aspasia, and there are many students of English who would barter a good deal of 'literature' for the authentic love-letters of a series of cook-maids from the 15th to the 18th century. Still, the noble dames and damsels are very helpful. Their husbands, whose

spelling was 'vitiated' by the grammar-school and the university, are untrustworthy witnesses, but the ladies, whose time appears to have been chiefly occupied in making preserves for the household and flannel petticoats for the poor, and whose school-room instruction was usually of the slightest, easily relapsed into a phonetic system representing the pronunciation which they shared with families of less 'edjication' in 'Lunnon' or the country. Unfortunately, even the ladies remembered too much of what they had been taught. Thus Lady Wentworth, who no doubt called her *nephew* her *nevy*, spells it regularly *nephew*. She also writes *value* or *valewe*; but, in one moment of forgetfulness, writing as she pronounced, she describes a 'pretious jewell, sartainly (as Solloman ses) hard to be found, but highly to be vallyed when found.' This pronunciation long survived in America—

' In short, I firmly du believe
In Humbug generally,
For it's a thing thet I perceive
To hev a solid vally.'

(Russell Lowell, *The Pious Editor's Creed*)

George Eliot tells us that Nancy Lammeter, who was a squire's daughter, pronounced *horse* as *oss*, unlike the young ladies from the neighbouring county town, 'who habitually said *orse*.' I take leave to doubt the latter part of this statement, not because of the absent *h*,—for what we know of the history of that sound does not amount to much more than the fact that, before the latter part of the 19th century,

nine-tenths of the population bothered very little about its presence or absence—but because it is not likely that there was any difference between rustic speech and that of a provincial town in the same region. The loss of *r* before *s* was pretty regular in colloquial speech. The buttermilk now says *Dorset*, but his grandfather, Mr. Middlewick, in *Our Boys*, observes with an appraising sniff 'Dosset, inferior Dosset,' while *mossel* for *morsel*, still heard in dialect, was once general, and is, in fact, the earliest form recorded in English (13th century). We still allow, in playful speech, *cussedness* and *bust*, and a similar pronunciation is heard in the barrister's *m'Lud* and the policeman's *y'r Wushup*.

In no region of sound has the printed word so exercised its influence as in obliterating the old Cockney confusion between *w* and *v*, for which our great authorities are Messrs. Weller, *père et fils*, or, as they preferred to call themselves, 'Veller.' Opinions are divided as to the *terminus ad quem* of this peculiarity, of which the only survival is the nautical to '*wear* (i.e. *veer*) ship.' My own evidence is that I was born in London in 1865, and that, though I never heard *v* for *w*, the opposite change, as in *wicious*, *wittles*, etc., was perfectly familiar to me, in the mouths of venerable Cockneys of the humblest class, in the early 'seventies. Though usually called 'Cockney,' this phenomenon really belonged to a considerable region of the south-east of England. There are traces of it in the 15th century, and it occurs sporadically over a much

wider area than the south-east, e.g. I have found *wellant* for *villain* in the *Nottingham Borough Records* for 1573. The earliest *Oxford Dictionary* records are—'Villiam, I wants my vig. . . . Vitch vig, Sir? Vy, the vite vig in the vooden vig-box, vitch I vore last Vensday at the westry'—a rigmarole put together in 1803 by Pegge the antiquary—and 'Werry like Wenus'—from Foote's *Mayor of Garratt* (1763). Much earlier and more genuine examples occur in the *Diary of Henry Machyn* (1550-63), printed by the Camden Society. Machyn was a Cockney tradesman, unspoiled by education, who spelt his words as he pronounced them. Accordingly, in his invaluable *Diary*, we find *volsake*, *voman*, and *welvet*, *wacabond*; after which the reader will not be surprised to hear that Mr. Machyn had a friend called *Hambrose*, and that he occasionally journeyed as far as *Anton Court*.

Now there is no reason to doubt that Machyn's spelling is a true indication of his pronunciation, or that his pronunciation conformed with that in general use in the same region and period. As early as the 13th century we find *vessel* spelt *wessel*. A 16th-century divine would naturally write *vessel*, but it is even betting that, in speech, he would apostrophize the ungodly in the very terms which aroused the ire of Mr. Weller, senior—'He called me a wessel, Sammy, a wessel of wrath,' or, like Mrs. Gamp, describe this world as the 'walley of the shadder.' The last word reminds us that even Pope rimes *fellow* with *prunella*, and that Sam Weller's pronunciation, 'A indiwiidual in company has

called me a feller,' has come into use again in recent years.

It is the custom of most, unfortunately not of all, antiquarian societies to reproduce exactly the original spelling of the documents they publish. In the 17th-century autobiography of one Raymond (Camden Society) we read that 'there was boyling on the fyer a pipkin of pease pottage. . . . It was throwne downe, broke, and all the porridge about the chamber.' If this had been printed in Raymond's own day, the compositor would have stuck to either *pottage* or *porridge*, and we should have lost an absolute confirmation of the fact that *porridge* is a corruption of *pottage*, or rather of its colloquial form *poddidge*, the sounds of *d* and *r* being almost indistinguishable in some dialects of the south. Mrs. Gamp used *imperent* for *impudent*, and rustics still say 'the very moral of' for *model*; while such an observant artist as Mr. H. G. Wells represents by *blurry* the proletarian pronunciation of that national intensive which is banned among the more anæmic classes. The opposite change is seen in *paddock*, for the obsolete *parrock*, i.e. *park*, and in the architectural *pediment*, for *periment*, a workman's corruption of *pyramid*. To a similar confusion between *l* and *n* we owe *banister*, described by Walker as a corruption of *baluster*, and Mrs. Gamp's *chimley*, which has the authority of John Knox. A printed advertisement of the 18th century proclaims the efficiency of Jeane Tempell 'the woman chimbley-sweper.'

One of my earliest subjects, some forty years ago,

for phonetic experiment was a venerable London busman, an admirable specimen of a type now vanished, to the infinite loss of Cockney humour. This sage opined that a man who was in no hurry to get to the 'cemetery' would do well to take a 'drop o' sperrits' of a cold morning rather than the 'cup o' cawfey' recommended by benighted tee-totallers. *Cemetery* has the authority of Caxton, who used this form, from French *cimetière*, long before anyone wrote *cemetery*. *Sperrit*, the correct representative of Old French *esperit*, is now replaced by the learned form *spirit*. The first lexicographer (17th century) to register *coffee* spells it *cauphè*, the vowel sound having been gradually shortened, as in Lady Wentworth's *soger*, for Margaret Paston's *sawger*, both superseded by the modern corruption *soldier*.

Who wrote the following?—'As lovly a boy as ever was seen, and of an undanted sperritt.—He is the very pictur of your poor brother Will, he has such a wheedling ingagin way with him.' Well, it might have been Mrs. Gamp, but, as a matter of fact, it was Lady Wentworth. She also uses the correct *spet*, Anglo-Saxon *spætan*, instead of the dialect form *spit*, as did also my friend the busman, who once, for a bet of a 'biled leg of mutton and trimmins,' smoked twelve pipes in succession 'without drinkin or spettin.' Like Mrs. Gamp she speaks of her *lodgins*, while her daughter-in-law, Countess Strafford, notes that the Archbishop of York is miserly in the matter of his *kitching* fire.

The attachable, or detachable, character of certain final sounds has for result that 'correct English' now includes a very accidental job lot of accepted forms. It is pure chance that *drownd* and *gownd*, once in use in the best circles, have not survived by the side of *bound*, as in 'bound to go,' for Chaucerian '*boun* (i.e. equipped) to go,' and *sound*, for *soun*—

' A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
And therewithal he brogt us out of towne.'

(*Prol.*, 565)

The colloquial 'fi'-pun note' shows the opposite process. Lady Wentworth writes a 'hundred thoussand poun,' and, in the old rime of Sally Water, the rimes depend upon the taste and fancy of the speller—

' Down came the mother in her velvet gown(d) :

" You shan't have my daughter for five thousand poun(d)." "

No scholar would now describe himself as a *scholard*, though he calls by the name *pilchard* a fish which was formerly known as a *pilcher*. A spot on linen now called *iron-mould* was earlier, and correctly, *iron-mole*, from the word now used only of a natural mark on the skin, while the animal called a *mole* should be called a *mould*, short for the older *mould-warpe*, i.e. mould-thrower. The *hold* of a ship is for earlier *hole*, while the meaningless verb to *buttonhole* is a corruption of the original, and much more expressive, *buttonhold*. With 'Ole Bill,'

immortalized by Mr. Bairnsfather, we may compare 'Oll Jewry' in Machyn's *Diary*.

We have quite a group of words in which an incorrect *t* has become legalized, e.g. *peasant*, *tyrant*, *pheasant*, *graft*, *tuft*, the older form of the last word surviving in the vulgar *toff*. *Varment*, for *vermin*, is not now used by the best people, though 18th-century versifiers rimed it with *garment*; nor, conversely, is *object* permissible for *objeck* or *nex door* for *next door*. But Lady Wentworth describes her new house as having 'a fyne prospeck in the parke,' and reports a polite conversation in the following terms—'The Dr. said he designed to have a sarment preeched. My lord asked what the tex should be.'

I recently caught in the street a scrap of dialogue in which one speaker expressed his intention of 'putting it acrost' the other. I need hardly say that he was one of the elderly and unstandardized—the sort of man, in fact, who says *onct* for *once*. This is, of course, very wrong, but not quite so bad as our *against*, *amidst*, *amongst*, in which we have tacked *-st* to the original. If there is such a thing as right and wrong in language, the man who is *again* the Government is entitled to regard as a linguistic vulgarian the man who is *against* it, for he has on his side the combined authority of the philologist and Mrs. Gamp. It may also be noted that the rustic *agen* (also *agin*) was once normal, as in a famous panegyric—

'The noble Duke of York, with twenty thousand men,
He marched them up the hill and he marched them down
again.'

At the beginning of a word or syllable no consonant is so elusive as *w*. The rustic 'ooman occurs in the *Paston Letters*, and was used as late as the 19th century by Lady Lucy Pusey, mother of the great Churchman, whom she habitually addressed as *Edard*, and who was probably some years the junior of 'Edard Cuttle, mariner.' Mr. Weller senior's commendation of his son's first love-letter was especially evoked by the fact that 'there ain't no callin' names in it, no Wenuses nor nothin' of that kind. Wot's the good o' callin' a young ooman a Venus?' (*Pickwick*, ch. 33). There is a legend of a British toiler whose objection to German beer was that 'you don't get no forrarder with it.' Most people now sound the *w* in *toward*, which, according to Walker, should rime with *hoard*, but we have not yet become 'correct' enough to reintroduce the *w* sound into *Harwich*, *Berwick*, *Greenwich*, etc. Early orthoepists give quite a list of words in which initial *w* is silent, including *word* itself, Shakespeare's 'prave ords,' attributed to Fluellen, suggesting that this may have been especially a Welsh peculiarity. The loss or addition of this sound shows the same apparent cussedness as the treatment of the *h* in uneducated speech or the *v* and *w* system of Mr. Weller; e.g. in Essex 'I on't' is common for 'I won't,' but *oats* are called *wuts*. The addition of *w* seems, however, to have been originally a Western feature. Tyndale, a Gloucestershire man, usually has *won* for *one* in his Bible translation, and Barnes, the Dorset poet, writes *woak* for *oak*. The older, and 'correct,' pronunciation of *one* still survives in

the colloquial 'good un,' 'young un,' etc., as also in *only*, *alone*, and *atone* (to set 'at one').

We do not now speak of a *biled*¹ leg of mutton, though Pope rimes *join* with *line*—

'And middle natures, how they long to join,
Yet never pass the insuperable line,'

(*Essay on Man*, i, 228),

but we speak of a *boil* on the neck, where the rustic uses the uncorrupted *bile*. Also we talk of getting *riled*, for earlier *roiled*, and pronounce as *joist* the word which the Billickin, showing her lodgings to Mr. Grewgious and his ward, called by the older name of *jiste* (*Edwin Drood*, ch. 23), from Old French *giste*. I have a distinct recollection of hearing that famous evangelist, the late Mr. Moody, asking for windows to be opened before his congregation was *pisoned*. *Turquoise*, which Walker pronounced *turkeeze* and Milton *turkess* (cf. *bourgeois* and *burgess*), has definitely succumbed to its artificial spelling, and will, I suppose, eventually be furnished with convenient rimes in *porpoise* and *tortoise*. The London flower-girl who offers *vi'lets* preserves Dryden's pronunciation of that word. The 'Corinth raisin' is now a *currant*, but a conventional spelling has gradually led to the disuse of *furriner*. Similarly we all now pronounce *oblige*, while, within living memory, gentlemen of the old school still said

¹ Walker (1791) gives the modern pronunciation, though Kenrick had stated, only eighteen years earlier, that 'it would now appear affectation to pronounce other than *bile*, *jine*.'

*obleege*¹ (French *obliger*), just as, owing to a phonetic spelling, we all say *esteem* (French *estimer*)—

‘Dreading ev’n fools, by flatterers besieged,
And so obliging that he ne’er obliged.’
(Pope, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, l. 207)

In 1606, Sylvester, in his once famous translation of Du Bartas, wrote—

‘The world was like a large and sumptuous shop,
Where God his goodly treasures did unwrap’—

i.e. he either pronounced *wrop*, like Mr. Yellowplush, or *shap*, like Queen Elizabeth. The latter is more likely, for the pronunciation represented by *Gad*, *drat* (for ‘God rot’) and Lord Foppington’s ‘Stap my vitals!’ was prevalent in Tudor times, and indeed much earlier. A curious survival of it is *strap*, of which the old form *strop* is now preserved only by the barber. This fashionable change of vowel has been attributed to the Devon men of Elizabeth’s time. It was perhaps also partly due to the Scots who came south with James I. The parallel of the ‘wee drap’ naturally occurs to one. Also Roderick Random’s Scotch barber friend was Strap. Walker, in 1791, observes that *wrap* is ‘often pronounced

¹ ‘When Lord Chesterfield wrote his letters to his son, the word *oblige* was, by many polite speakers, pronounced as if written *obleege*, to give a hint of their knowledge of the French language; nay, Pope had rhymed it to this sound. But it was so far from having generally obtained, that Lord Chesterfield strictly enjoins his son to avoid this pronunciation as affected’ (Walker).

rop, rhyming with *top*, even by speakers much above the vulgar.' *Drat* does not seem to have finally prevailed over *'od rot* (cf. *'odsfish*, etc.) till the 19th century. In 1812 Horace and James Smith still write—

“ ‘ What are they fear'd on ? fools ! 'od rot 'em ! ”
Were the last words of Higginbottom.’

(*Rejected Addresses*)

Now that the whole population is brought up on the printed letter there is much more resistance to vowel change, and it is hardly likely that to ‘ tike the kike ’ will ever gain general acceptance. Lady Wentworth always writes *sarvis*, *sartenly*, and, as we have already seen, *sarment*, and my private conviction is that she also said *warmint*. That this pronunciation of *er* was once general is shown by the fact that *clerk*, *sergeant*, *Berkeley*, etc., usually appear in the surname list as *Clark*, *Sargent*, *Barclay*, etc. Sylvester describes the Almighty as—

‘ A plenteous victualler whose provisions serve
Millions of cities that else needs must starve.’

This stock rime is still found in Dr. Watts more than a century later, and ‘ Sarve you right ’ was till recently a formula of consolation in some circles—

‘ The jury, in fine, having sat on the body
The whole day, discussing the case and gin-toddy,
Return'd about half-past eleven at night
The following verdict, “ We find, Sarve her right ! ” ’

(*Ingoldsby*)

But the influence of spelling has, in many words, brought about reversion to *er*, and in the United States *clerk* is pronounced to rime with *shirk*. In fact, so strong is the American antipathy to the *ar* sound that 'darned impudence' often becomes 'durned impudence.'

The place of the accent is an important criterion of educated speech. The tendency of English is to shift it gradually to the first syllable. *Decádent*, admitted as late as 1897 by the *Oxford Dictionary*, is now definitely replaced by *décadent*.¹ The older accentuation of *cóntrary* survives in 'Mary, Mary, quite contráry.' My friend the busman once informed me that 'these 'ere bicýcles and tricýcles are a reglar noosance to proper vehícles.' Sylvester rimes *theatre* with *creator*, and, though the modern pronunciation is as old as Shakespeare, *theáter* has always persisted by the side of it, even up to the 19th century, in the mouths of the educated. *Balcóny* was once regular —

' At Edmonton, his loving wife
From the balcóny spied
Her tender husband, wond'ring much
To see how he did ride.'

(Cowper, *John Gilpin*)

Swift once used *bálcóny* in verse, but this Irishism, as it was then considered, made Samuel Rogers 'sick.' Byron still rimes *balcóny* with *Giorgione*. *Antípodes* once rimed with *codes*. Those who would be horrified at the singular *antípode* are guilty of its

¹ I do not intend to obey the B.B.C. by saying *decádent*.

twin when they speak of a *satellite*, formed in the same way from the four-syllabled plural *satellites*—

‘ Or ask of yonder argent fields above
Why Jove’s satellites are less than Jove.’
(Pope, *Essay on Man*, i. 42)

Lord Frederic Hamilton, in *Forty Years On*, gives the following rigmarole¹ to illustrate what the author regards as deliberately affected mispronunciation of the English language by septuagenarians dating from the end of the 18th century. If he had been a philologist, he would have known that the old gentlemen and ladies he listened to were using what was correct English before the pedantic schoolmaster had done his deadly work—‘ The dear dook was obleeged by the heat to set in a gyarden cheer, under the laloc trees, drinking tay out of yallow chaney coops, while his leddy on the balcóny ate cowcumpers and reddishes off goold plates brought to Oxfordsheer from Roome,’ etc.

For every one of these now old-fashioned pronunciations an industrious student could find good historic authority. I will be satisfied with quoting Shakespeare for the last word—

‘ So fares it with this faultful lord of Rome,
Who this accomplishment so hotly chased ;
For now against himself he sounds this doom,
That through the length of times he stands disgraced.’
(*Lucrece*)

¹ I have quoted this elsewhere in my little book on the English language (Benn’s 6d. series).

Finally, the vulgar pronunciation of the Deity's name is certified as literary by two illustrious Cockneys. Pope rimes *God* with *unaw'd*, while his contemporary Dr. Watts is responsible for the lines—

‘ Whene’er I take my walks abroad,
How many poor I see !
What shall I render to my God
For all His gifts to me ? ’

CHAPTER X

AMERICANISMS

1. *The American Language*. By H. L. Mencken. Second edition revised. Cape, 1922.
2. *Martin Arrowsmith*. By Sinclair Lewis. Cape, 1925.
3. *Americana*, 1925. Edited by H. L. Mencken. Hopkinson, 1925.
4. *Midas, or the United States and the Future*. By C. H. Bretherton. Kegan Paul, 1926.
5. *The English Language in America*. By George Philip Krapp. Oxford University Press, 1926.

THE American gentleman who made Martin Chuzzlewit acquainted with Mrs. Hominy explained that he was about to go home 'by the return train, which starts immediate.' Incidentally, he conveyed the linguistic information, 'Start is not a word you use in your country, sir.' 'Oh yes, it is,' said Martin. 'You air mistaken, sir,' returned the gentleman, with great decision; 'but we will not pursue the subject, lest it should awake your přějů-díce.' This scrap of dialogue recurred to my memory on reading some remarks in Mr. Mencken's *American Language* on the differences between the American and English vocabularies. In a long parallel list we learn *inter alia* that for American *campaign* (political), *coal*, *mantel-piece*, *outbuildings* (farm), *pay-day*, *silver* (collectively), *smoking-room*, *sweater*, the Englishman uses *canvass*, *coals*, *chimney-piece*, *offices*, *wage-day*, *plate*, *smoke-room*, *jersey*. We are further told that

'no Englishman ever wears a frock-coat or lives in a bungalow,' 'when an English business man retires he does not actually retire; he declines business,' 'an Englishman will say that he is seven-and-forty, not that he is forty-seven,' 'they [Englishmen] never run a hotel; they always keep it or manage it,' 'another word that is improper in America, but not in England, is *tart*, a clipped form of *sweet-heart*.'

These statements, which, apart from the concluding specimen of etymological erudition, will appear extraordinary to most Englishmen, illustrate the extreme difficulty—one might almost say the impossibility—for an Englishman of learning American or *vice versa*. It is perhaps possible, in a lifetime of study and observation, to acquire such a colloquial knowledge of a foreign tongue as to become the possessor of two instruments, each perfect and neither ever influenced by the other; but it is doubtful whether the same end can be attained when it is a question of two slightly differing forms of one and the same language. Mr. Mencken gives copious examples of the blunders committed by English writers, who, after considerable experience of life in the United States, attempt to make their characters speak American—

'Every English author who attempts to render the speech of American characters makes a mess of it. H. G. Wells' American in *Mr. Britling sees it Through* is only matched by G. K. Chesterton's in *Man Alive* [*sic*]. Even Kipling, who submitted the manuscript of *Captain Courageous* [*sic*] to American friends for criticism, yet managed to make an American in it say, "He's by way of being a fisherman now."'

I have recently noted in an American novel the sentence, 'I hope you don't carry your philosophy that far,' put into the mouth of an English nobleman; while in Miss Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, Sir Edgar observes, 'Oh! Then if I had happened along a fortnight ago, I shouldn't have found you here.' In May 1926, a leading American newspaper quoted the opinion of a typical British working-man to the effect that 'Hif th' miners loose this strike, livin' conditions among the liboring men of Hengland will be worse than ever—Blyme! they're bad enow now.' Mr. Bretherton's *Midas* is written in English English, but occasionally his speech bewrayeth his long sojourn in the United States. He uses *garbage-can* and *ash-barrel* for *dustbin*, speaks of a 'steady seepage of population from the country to the town,' and of 'a community which feeds its superfluous population to the crocodiles.'

It seems to be agreed that the word *Americanism* was coined in 1784 by John Witherspoon, the Scottish-American President of Princeton. He explains it as 'an use of phrases or terms, or a construction of sentences, even among persons of rank and education, different from the uses of the same terms and phrases, or the construction of similar sentences, in Great Britain.'

The earliest English author quoted by the *Oxford Dictionary* as using the word is Miss Mitford, who wrote in *Our Village* (1826), 'Society has been progressing (if I may borrow that expressive Americanism) at a very rapid rate.' It may be observed,

en passant, that this use of *progress* as a verb is one of the many American survivals or revivals of words and senses perfectly familiar in 16th- and 17th-century English.

Although the winning of political independence impelled some American publicists to declare for independence in language, the general tendency of early American writers on the subject is to recognize the identity of their speech with that of the mother-country. The claim has even been made repeatedly that the English spoken in the United States is purer and more correct than that spoken in England. We often hear the same claim put forward by Ulster, Aberdeen, Claybury-in-the-Hole, and other centres of culture. Further, it is asserted by Witherspoon and others that American speech shows a much greater uniformity than English. As recently as 1860, George P. Marsh wrote—

'It is a trite observation that, though very few Americans speak as well as the educated class of Englishman, yet not only is the average of English used here, both in speaking and writing, better than that of the great mass of the English people, but there are fewer local peculiarities of form and articulation in our vast extent of territory than on the comparatively narrow soil of Britain. In spite of disturbing and distracting causes, English is more emphatically *one* in America than in its native land, and, if we have engrafted on our mother speech some widespread corruptions, we have very nearly freed the language, in our use of it, from some vulgar and disagreeable peculiarities exceedingly common in England.'

The patriotic view of American superiority is also, according to Professor Krapp, upheld in Mr. Gilbert M. Tucker's recent *American English*.

The comments of English writers on the American language are, during the first half of the 19th century, usually disparaging, even venomous. Mrs. Trollope, in her *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), tells us that—

‘Those [Americans] who have chanced to find themselves in the society of the few educated English who have visited America have discovered that there is a marked difference between their phrases and accents and those to which they have been accustomed, wherefore they have, of course, decided that no Englishman can speak English.’

Mr. Bretherton, in his *Midas*, makes the remark that Americans write one language and speak another—

‘The American speaks American—a crisp, virile, colourful language, full of copious possibilities—and writes English which he really does not really understand.’

This is true, of course, of all nations, but especially of the United States, where, if one may judge from contemporary novels, the spoken language of even the educated class is rapidly degenerating into a jargon. In American works of scholarship we occasionally come across trifling peculiarities, such as the past participle *gotten* or the use of *loan* as a verb, and most English readers will boggle at Mr. Mencken’s allusion in his Preface to the ‘wild snarls’ of his manuscript; but, broadly speaking, the cultivated American writer on politics, history, literature, art, etc., uses the same language as the cultivated Englishman.

In the *Letters* of that great gentleman, Walter

Hines Page, written in familiar language to his relatives and friends, we find all the characteristic American colloquialisms, e.g. 'bully good plan,' 'buy a newspaper on the street,' 'he eats out of my hand in the afternoon and has one of his papers jump on me in the morning' (this causative use of the verb *have* seems particularly common), 'in the fall or in December,' 'you'd just as well abandon your trip,' 'nothin' doin',' 'to lick to a frazzle,' 'they can't whip Great Britain,' 'quit dreaming,' 'for keeps,' with such national figures of speech as 'the nigger in the woodpile,' 'never tie up with a crank,' 'that's really what they're out gunning for,' 'he'll cut no more figure than a tar-baby at a negro meeting,' 'the Kaiser woke up the wrong passenger.' Page also shows a devotion to the archaic use of the subjunctive after *if*, *supposing*, etc., which does not accord with contemporary English usage. But we find nothing approaching the jerky, explosive jargon, the mixture of the crude with the high-falutin, which one gathers from Mr. Sinclair Lewis's novels to be the usual medium of communication among the professional and business men of the Middle West.

In an article published last year in the *Sunday Times*, Mr. Alfred Noyes rebuked those who regard the inhabitants of the Middle West as a lot of uncultivated 'hicks,' or what Mr. Bretherton wittily terms 'a gigantic Babbitt warren.' 'It is,' says Mr. Bretherton, 'from this region that come most of America's cranks, fanatics, revolutionaries, uplifters, patriots, and other well-meaning trouble-

makers.' Mr. Channing Pollock is still harder on his own countrymen. Not only the inhabitants of the Middle West, but ' ninety per cent. of Americans are intellectual morons,¹ judging by their taste in pictures, comic supplements, music, and drama.' After all, the corresponding percentage in England would hardly be lower.

We are, however, concerned here with language only, and especially with language in its relation to our own contemporary Americanized English. The poetry of the Middle West has not, so far, appreciably affected us. The following lines by Mr. Carl Sandburg need to be read, says Miss Rebecca West, with a Middle West accent—

' Rum tiddy um
tiddy um
tiddy um tum tum
My knees are looselike, my feet
want to sling theirselves.'

Without the Middle West accent they somehow fail to please. The prose of the Middle West is, however, both intelligible and effective, if not elegant. Martin Arrowsmith went to Nautilus as assistant to the local Director of Public Health, Dr. Almus Pickerbaugh. Here is that public-spirited official's invitation to a congress—

' Brother Males and Shemales ; are you coming to the Health Bee ? It will be the liveliest Hop-to-it that this busy lil ole

¹ This word, from Greek *mōros*, dull, stupid, is due to Dr. H. C. Goddard, of Columbus, Ohio. In the same State originated the current use of *welfare*, as in ' child welfare,' etc.

planet has ever see. And its going to be Practical. We'll kiss out on all these glittering generalities and get messages from men as kin talk, so we can lug a think or two (2) home wid us. Luther Botts, the famous community sing leader, will be there to put Wim and Wigor neverything into the programme. John F. Zeisser, M.A., M.D., nall the rest of the alphabet (part your hair Jock and look cute, the ladies sure love you) will unlimber a coupla key-notes. (On your tootsies, fellers, thar she blows !)

From time to time, if the brakes hold, we will, or shall in the infinitive, hie oursellufs from wherein we are at to thither and grab a lunch with Wild Wittles. Do it sound like a good show ? It do ! Barber, you're next. Let's have those cards saying you're coming.'

This 'snappy come-on letter' was highly approved by a medical colleague, in spite of the criticism of—

'one old hen, Bostonian or somepun, who was howling that your letter was undignified. Can you beat it ? I think people as hypercritical and lacking in humour as her should be treated with the dignified contempt they deserve, the damn fool !'

Lay opinion is voiced by the local 'cop'—

'If you want the straight dope, he hollers a good deal, but he's one awful brainy man. He can certainly sling the Queen's English, and never hear one of his poems ? They're darn bright, I'll tell you. There's some people say Pickerbaugh pulls the song and dance too much, but way I figure it, course maybe for you and me, Doctor, it'd be all right if he just looked after the milk and the kids' teeth. But there's a lot of careless, ignorant, foreign slobs that need to be jollied into using their conks about these health biznai,' etc.

Finally—

'On a certain evening of May, Congressman Almus Pickerbaugh was dining with the President of the United States. "When the campaign is over, Doctor," said the President, "I hope we shall see you a cabinet member—the first Secretary of Health and Eugenics in the country !"'

It was really very forgiving of America to award to Mr. Sinclair Lewis's *Martin Arrowsmith* the Pulitzer prize, given annually for 'the American novel which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood.' It was graceful of Mr. Sinclair Lewis to decline it. He perhaps felt that the prize might have been awarded with almost equal fitness to *Martin Chuzzlewit*. I have no means of knowing how far his presentment of the English language as spoken and written at Nautilus, Iowa, is a caricature; but I find in Mr. Mencken's *Americana*, 1925, the following extract from a speech by one of the professors at the Iowa State College—

'Des Moines has the largest per capita ice-cream consumption in America.

The second largest gold-fish farm in the world is located within seventy miles of Des Moines.

The best pair of overalls made on the American continent come from Iowa.

There is no group of two and a half million people in the world who worship God as Iowans do.'

As Dickens visited the United States in 1842 and began the publication of *Martin Chuzzlewit* the next year, *Martin Arrowsmith* has followed his namesake at an interval of rather more than eighty years. It would appear that during that period a great change has taken place in colloquial American. The opening-up of vast regions which in Dickens's time were trackless wildernesses, the development of backwoods settlements into wealthy industrial cities,

the immigration of hordes representing every language, civilization, and uncivilization of Europe, all these have done much to break up that uniformity of speech noted by investigators of the early 19th century. That Dickens gave a fairly exact reproduction of the American language of his day may be taken for granted. In matters of external oddity or idiosyncrasy no man ever made more accurate observations or reproduced them more cunningly. The American language of *Martin Chuzzlewit* does not differ materially from that of colloquial English, except in some features of its pronunciation and accentuation. There is also that tendency to defy grammar, which, if we may trust Mr. Lewis, still distinguishes the intimate conversation of the American middle-class man, often coupled with an itch for the ‘ high falutin ’ which seems inseparable in America from any kind of public announcement, from the Declaration of Independence onward. When Martin replied to Mr. La Fayette Kettle that he had no reason for supposing that Queen Victoria would shortly ‘ be taken with a cold chill,’ that gentleman—

‘ looked at him as if in pity for his ignorance or prejudice and said, “ Well, sir, I tell you this—there ain’t a ěn-gĭne with its biler bust, in God A’mighty’s free U-nited States, so fixed, and nipped, and frizzled to a most e-tarnal smash, as that young critter, in her luxurious location in the Tower of London, will be, when she reads the next double-extra ‘ Watertoast Gazette.’ ” ’

The American population, as Dickens knew it, was still preponderantly Anglo-Saxon. He does not appear to have noted anything like the *dat* for *that*,

nuttin for *nothing*, etc., which contemporary novelists attribute to the Irish-American, or the amazing New York pronunciation of 'vowel plus *r*' which leads the New York child to explain *stoic* as 'the boid that brings the babies.' The whole of the second volume of Professor Krapp's important work is taken up with a detailed investigation of American pronunciation from the point of view of the scientific phonetician. On the general question of the received standard he emphasizes the fact that the tendency of the educated American is to be guided by spelling rather than tradition—'American English replaced social tests by literary educational tests in speech, the latter being almost altogether tests applied through the printed page.' As early as 1843 Webster observed that 'pronunciation in England is not regulated by books, or any book, but by the usage of the higher classes of society.' In short, the change now taking place in English pronunciation, the replacement of the traditional by the pedantic, has already been brought about in American. Professor Krapp is surely thinking ahead when he says that for *clerk* (riming in America with *jerk*) the pronunciation *clark* 'may' be heard in England!

In syntax there seem to be three chief differences between literary English and literary American. One is the, to English ears, pedantic attachment to the subjunctive which I have already mentioned as characterizing Page's letters, e.g. 'Whatever happen in Mexico,' 'Unless there be some reason,' 'I am now going down to Garden City and New York till

the President send for me ; or if he do not send for me, I'm going to his house and sit on his front steps till he come out.' Another is the tendency to omit the auxiliary *should* in subordinate clauses, e.g. 'He desired rather to keep free of these follies lest they confuse him and make him soft,' 'She insisted that he knock before entering and she demanded that he admire her hats.' In this construction, both examples of which are from *Martin Arrowsmith*, we have apparently a revival, rather than a survival, of the subjunctive. The third peculiarity, also exemplified in *Martin Arrowsmith*, is the omission of the verb *to be* in such sentences as 'He ordered a family in Shanty Town quarantined.' It may be prejudice, but I find all three of these constructions ugly and unnatural. They seem to be quite modern, and, like most novelties, they are worked to death.

The same tendency to exploit the verbal novelty appears in the constant recurrence of such 'vogue words' as *dope*, in a great variety of senses ; *proposition*, which, says Mr. Fowler, in his recently published *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, is now, under American influence, misused in English for proposal, task, job, problem, objective, undertaking, occupation, trade, opponent, possibility, prospect, area, field, method, experiment ; and *guy*, as in the following excerpt from a quite interesting story of low life and tall timber—

'I got a job in Minneapolis drivin' truck. The guy I worked for was a square guy—a guy that worked harder than the men he hired. I'd time to do a lot of thinkin' by that time, and the

more I watched this guy, the more thinkin' I done. I'd always said, like all them guys I run with, that a guy was a fool to work,' etc.

It might have been thought that the English had exhausted the possibilities of the verb *to get*, which foreigners not unnaturally regard as a possible substitute for nearly any verb in the language; but its use has been still further extended in America. It has become a verb of motion, commonly used in the imperative, and a euphemism for *kill*, as when the gunman 'gets' the sleuth or the sleuth 'gets' the gunman. The successful yegg-man makes his 'getaway' and the successful artist 'gets away with it,' while comprehension of a speaker's meaning can be conveyed by the formula 'I get you, Steve.'

This tendency to overwork a few words points to the real poverty of American, so far as it is used by the non-reading class. Often of foreign origin, living with parents who still speak a foreign language, acquiring in the elementary schools the merest smattering of English, which is bound to become vitiated by contact with uneducated Irish, Americanized Italian, Yiddish, and the many other ingredients of the melting-pot, the American 'guy' of the humbler class must inevitably remain inarticulate.¹ It is true that he makes up for his lack of vocabulary by the inventiveness of his figurative speech. Such similes as 'as sore as a flea on an iron dog,' or 'as much chance as an ice-cream freezer

¹ Mr. S. K. Ratcliffe tells me that he once heard, in New York, a young American explain to his lady-love, in excusing himself for some lapse, 'Guys is different than dames.'

in hell,' have both originality and picturesqueness. In connection with the second it may be remarked that the conversation of American fiction characters suggests that the word *hell* may conveniently be used to introduce any kind of comment or observation.

It would seem that not only in business American, but also in conversational American, outside really cultured and literary circles, grammatical correctness is no longer regarded as either necessary or desirable. Mr. Mencken's *Americana*, 1925, contains grotesque extracts from speeches and newspaper articles. *American Speech* for May 1926 quotes from a newspaper, 'Mr. Louis R. Cohen is no longer connected with the firm of the Jay Dress Company, any debts incurred by him will not be responsible by us since December 15, 1925.' Professor McKnight, in *English Words and their Background*, gives as a typical illustration of the American boy's language the sentence, 'Them guys ain't got no pep.' The conversational style of Mr. Babbitt and his friends is distinctly impressionist in its insistence on the essential and its neglect of transitions. The same features appear, refined and grammatically corrected, in the American literary style, which, says Professor Krapp, 'rests not upon a basis of structural organization, but is more a matter of points, of successive brilliant moments, of verbal ingenuities and surprises. It is a restless, rapid, animated style, a sparkling if not a profound style, whereas British style is a style of thought and constructive understanding.' To put it crudely, the

American style has the quality variously described as snap, vim, kick, or pep. When it aims at dignity, it tends to verge on the 'high falutin.' I have seldom read anything funnier, apart from its tragic subject, than Senator Smith's report on the *Titanic* disaster of 1912.

The earliest traces of the American influence on English are to be found about 1800, in connection with rather censorious English protests against supposed new American coinages such as *belittle*, *progress* (as a verb), *lengthy*, etc. Such protests were often begotten of ignorance and pedantry. *Belittle* is a very useful word, now quite at home in English, *progress* is, as I have already remarked, an American survival from Stuart times, *lengthy* expresses what cannot well be expressed otherwise, and its formation is parallel to that of *strengtheny*, which had a respectable English history of four centuries before it was relegated to dialect.

In the early part of the 19th century we find occasional allusions to American modes of expression. De Quincey in 1834 uses *eventuate*, explaining that he is 'speaking Yankeeishly,' and in the following year Michael Scott, in *The Cruise of the Midge*, writes, 'the squib had eventuated, as the Yankees say, . . . in a zigzag or cracker.' In 1836 *Fraser's Magazine* speaks offensively of 'those Yankeeisms which distinguish the lout from the gentleman.' The fantastic or humorous Yankee, 'guessing,' 'calculating,' and 'reckoning,' made his appearance as a character in English fiction.

The general attitude of the old country, as reflected in its writers and tourists, towards the States was one of unfriendly criticism, or of still more irritating condescension. But the use of a common language, commercial intercourse between the two countries, and a blood-relationship which was still a reality, inevitably resulted in some importation of American words and expressions. The Red Indian vocabulary, with its characteristic metaphor, such as 'burying the hatchet,' 'going on the war-path,' etc., was made familiar to the English reading public by the very popular novels of Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851). It would be possible to compile from this source a very considerable list of words and phrases, not altogether new to English, for many of them had become intelligible before the Revolution, but passing in the 19th century from the pages of *The Last of the Mohicans* into the verbal treasure-house of the schoolboy and the figurative language of everyday English.

The real flood of Americanisms began with the humorists. Washington Irving and Hawthorne wrote approximately the same language as their English contemporaries, but Artemus Ward (C. F. Browne), who died untimely in 1865, gave his English readers and hearers something absolutely new. American humour, with the entrancing oddity of its vocabulary, idiom, and mental processes, conquered England almost at a blow. Bret Harte familiarized us with the vocabulary and metaphor, the tragedy and comedy, of the miner's camp, and Mark Twain, the least great of the three, expressed in droll and

unexpected terms the homespun outlook of the cute and humorous American observer. The American dialect writers were also not without influence. Professor Krapp says—

‘American literary dialects which have been cultivated in any considerable body of literature are indeed not numerous and are readily recognizable as such from the literary monuments in which they appear. Of these the most familiar are the New England dialect, the Pike County or South-Western dialect of John Hay, Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and others, the Southern dialect and the negro dialect. All these dialects have been used sympathetically.’

Omitting Bret Harte and Mark Twain, who are not essentially dialect writers—in fact, the genuineness of Bret Harte’s digger’s language has been disputed—the two forms of American dialect literature which have been most popular in England are Lowell’s New England *Biglow Papers* and the *Brer Rabbit* legends of Uncle Remus (Joel Chandler Harris). More than forty years ago at Cambridge, a taciturn student named Turpin was called by his friends Brer Terrapin, because ‘he kept on saying nuffin.’ Many people have attempted to describe or define American humour. The quality in it, from Artemus Ward to O. Henry, which appeals to us is its unexpectedness. Though totally unlike English humour, it can, by some fantastic mental process, be appreciated by the English mind.

Apart from the influence of the professional humorists, the American element in English has arrived in successive waves, each wave reflecting a phase in the development of the United States. We

have the Fenimore Cooper or backwoods contribution, the outcome of the struggle with the redskin, that of the explorer and the prospector, looking out for *snags* in the uncharted rivers, or anxious to see how his first washing of auriferous earth will *pan out*, and that of the railway pioneer. Then comes, dating especially from the American Civil War, the new political vocabulary, the replacing of the *stump*, which was the backwoods orator's rostrum, by the *platform*, which now even has wet and dry *planks*. When the North and South made peace, *reconstruction* become the *mot d'ordre*. Then arose a new political figure, the *carpet-bagger*, the needy and seedy adventurer from the North eager to exploit the negro vote. Our own day has seen the birth of the *boot-legger*, the real obstacle to any modification of strict prohibition. The era of frenzied finance gave us the *wild-cat scheme*, the *bucket-shop*, and the alternations of *booms* and *slumps*. Mr. Karel Čapek has recently criticized the American admiration of the 'big.' It is curious how often the word recurs in the language. The man who succeeds in *big business*, makes *big money*, and is looked upon locally as the *big noise*.

Of late years English has been inundated with American slang pure and simple. Intercourse between the two nations has never been so intimate. It would, I imagine, be difficult to find an Englishman of any notoriety who has not done a lecturing tour in the States, and there is to Englishmen such an attractiveness in American idiom that very slight

contact with it is quickly reflected. Most English business men of any eminence cross the Atlantic frequently. As a result, they no longer speak of 'getting to business' but of 'getting down to brass tacks.' Sir Charles Higham, addressing business men at Nottingham (February 4, 1926), is reported as saying that the newspapers were 'pulling better results than ever.' Sir H. Walford Davies, giving evidence before a B.B.C. committee on music, explained that 'This jazz stuff has been fed to the public for years, and broadcasting is the best practicable way of counteracting its results.' His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, at a recent hunt lunch, expressed the opinion that Leicester-shire farmers are *bully*. This word, belonging to an older stratum of American, occurs in an historic utterance attributed to Theodore Roosevelt—'I stand by the Ten Commandments. They are bully.' The forcible picturesque element even enters, with what some people would regard as a shade of irreverence, into utterances inspired by religious enthusiasm. A recent American allusion to 'the pep of Saint Paul, the first booster' shows the same attitude of mind as the advertisement, in England (April 1926), of 'a real old-fashioned red-hot Holy-Ghost revival.'

The language of the American comic stage and of the cinema, unintelligible at first, is rapidly adopted into colloquial English. The *Times Literary Supplement* remarked lately that 'London to-day takes its musical comedies and films ready made to the last stitch of slang from America.' The novel heroine

now allows her face to 'register' her emotions, and Miss Murphy's *Cabinet of Characters, from Theophrastus to Galsworthy*, was recently described by a serious critic as 'a series of close-ups.'

American slang, like that of other countries, is in a perpetual state of flux. It is doubtful whether Josh Billings would be altogether intelligible to a modern New York audience. One leading characteristic is, of course, substitution. I do not remember coming across the word *dollar* in the conversation of Mr. Sinclair Lewis's characters. When Mr. Babbitt secured a bottle of gin for cocktail purposes, he was told by the 'bar-keep' that the price was twelve *bucks*. Professor McKnight tells us that—

'In the vocabulary of modern youth, chivalry is dead. The maiden is no longer placed on a pedestal or throne. She is no longer worshipped as a divinity. A girl is a jane, a dame, a moll, a flapper, a worm, a skirt, a smelt, a squab, a chicken, a doll, a sardine, a flirt, a damsel, a frail, a hairpin, a piece of calico, a petting skirt. If she is popular she is a darb, a peach, a bird, a belle, a live one, a baby vamp, a whizz, a pippin, a star, a sweet patootie, a baby, a choice bit of calico, a sweetums, a snappy piece of work, a pretty Geneviève, a thrill, a flesh-and-blood angel. If she is unpopular, she is a pill, a pickle, a lemon, a dead one, a priss, a tomato, a chunk of lead, a drag, a gloom, a rag, an oil-can, a crumb, a nut-cracker face, a flat-tire, a mess.'

As this dates from 1923 the list should probably now be modified and augmented.

Meiosis and hyperbole seem to be equally useful to the American slang-coiner. The first is exemplified by 'sitting up and taking nourishment,' as a description of vigorous health, or the already ancient to 'make oneself scarce,' the second by such

figures as 'greased lightning' or 'till hell freezes.' But brevity is perhaps the chief feature. This is attained either by apocope, as in *vamp* for *vampire*, *mutt* for *muttonhead*, *fan* for *fanatic* (apparently), etc., or by the substitution of an expressive monosyllable or compound of monosyllables for a longer word or description. It is here that American slang has made a real and useful contribution to colloquial English. There is about these American tabloids a terseness and a finality which leave nothing more to be said. When we have defined the Communist as either a *crank* or a *crook*, the subject is really exhausted. It is difficult now to imagine how we got on so long without the word *stunt*, how we expressed the characteristics so conveniently summed up in *dope-fiend* or *high-brow*, or any other possible way of describing that mixture of the cheap pathetic and the ludicrous which is now universally labelled *sob-stuff*. The amount of expression that American can give to the inexpressive particle is truly marvellous. This fact had been quickly noted by our own speakers and writers. An English preacher of distinction has lately declared from the pulpit that 'The Church is *up against* the indifference of the masses, and it is *up to* the Church to transform that indifference into eager enthusiasm.' I have recently read in a university examination paper that 'Molière was *out* to reform society by the medium of laughter.' In American the man who is 'for it' is a man who is 'going to get his,' or, more fully, who is 'going to get what's coming to him.'

At the present time great efforts are being made in the United States to teach correct English to the children of the foreign-born. It is possible that these efforts, combined with recent measures against multitudinous immigration, may have as a result the creation of a fairly homogeneous colloquial speech not too remote from educated English. If, as seems more likely, the American temperament, despite its general docility to standardization, persists in its present attitude towards a standardized language, spoken American must eventually become as distinct from English as Yiddish is from classical Hebrew.

CHAPTER XI

MISUNDERSTOOD

JUST as scientific discoveries are sometimes flukes, or rather examples of what Horace Walpole calls *serendipity*,¹ i.e. the faculty for finding one thing when looking for another, so language has often been enriched (or, if you prefer it, disfigured) by misunderstandings. There are few more convenient phrases than 'psychological moment.' It expresses 'nick of time' with something added, and there is no other way of conveying its exact sense. Yet, according to the *Oxford Dictionary*, it originally 'passed nonsensically into English journalese,' and Samuel Butler, writing in 1901, says, 'The present moment is, to use the slang of the day, a "psychological" one (why not simply "opportune"?) for its appearance.' The expression dates from the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1. The Prussian

¹ 'The discovery I made by a talisman, which Mr. Chute calls the *Sortes Walpolianae*, by which I find everything I want, à *pointe nommée* [*sic*], wherever I dip for it. This discovery, indeed, is almost of that kind which I call "Serendipity," a very expressive word, which, as I have nothing better to tell you, I shall endeavour to explain to you: you will understand it better by the derivation than by the definition. I once read a silly fairy story called "The Three Princes of Serendip." As their Highnesses travelled, they were always making discoveries of things which they were not in quest of.' (*Letter to Horace Mann*, January 28, 1754.)

Kreuz-Zeitung, discussing (December 16, 1870) the projected bombardment of Paris, used *das psychologische moment* (neuter)—i.e. ‘momentum’ or determining factor—to express the probable effect on the *moral*¹ of the Parisians. French writers, at that time generally very unfamiliar with German, understood it as though the German journalist had written *der psychologische moment* (masc.), i.e. ‘moment of time.’ Sarcey, in his *Siège de Paris* (1871), rendered it by *moment psychologique*, which is explained by the *Dictionnaire Général* as ‘le moment où l’âme est dans l’attente de quelque chose qui doit s’accomplir.’ Sarcey’s book was at once translated into English, and so our language was enriched by a phrase which we should now be sorry to relinquish.

Another phrase due to mistranslation is ‘by leaps and bounds,’ now used of rapid, unhesitating progress. I believe we owe this to Gladstone’s misunderstanding of the French ‘par sauts et par bonds,’ which is applied to an irregular, interrupted movement, ‘by fits and starts.’ To Gladstone also, ‘a very ignorant man,’ according to Mr. Wells, is due the popularity of the phrase ‘bag and baggage’ as a concomitant of headlong ejection. He was not the first² to misuse it, but his famous outburst

¹ I respect Mr. Fowler’s authority and delight in his *Modern English Usage*, but I will not use *morale* in this sense.

² As a matter of fact the very phrase was used in the same connection, more than half a century earlier, by Stratford Canning, ‘the great Elchi.’ In a letter written to his brother George in 1821 he expresses the wish that the Sultan could be ‘driven, bag and baggage, into the heart of Asia.’ It is quite possible that Gladstone, who knew the Cannings, may have heard the expression from one of them.

(1876) on 'Bulgarian atrocities,' in which he called for the immediate expulsion of the Turks from the Balkan provinces, first made it a household word. Originally it was a military term, describing an evacuation with all the honours of war. Thus Sydenham Poyntz, an adventurer who served in the Thirty Years War, writes of the surrender of Ratisbon, 'The cittizens made their peace with the King. The souldiers to depart with bag and baggage, flying colours,¹ bullet ith mouth and burning matches, and to bee convoyed as far as Norinberg.' Somewhat earlier Touchstone had said, 'Come, shepherd, let us make an honourable retreat; though not with bag and baggage, yet with scrip and scrippage' (*As You Like It*, iii, 2).

There are some words to which a rather uneducated communal usage has given a new meaning. Mr. Winston Churchill is reported to have said (October 20, 1924), 'Mr. MacDonald has descended to a level which no Prime Minister of this country had demeaned himself by touching before.' The verb *demean* means simply 'behave.' It comes from Old French *se demener*,² with very much the sense of

¹ This example of coming off 'with flying colours,' written in 1636, is considerably earlier than the first *Oxford Dictionary* record of the phrase.

² It is a sad commentary on human nature that Old Fr. *se demener* commonly means also to behave without restraint, to rave, etc. Cf. our colloquial 'carry on,' properly to pursue one's occupation, but also with the two special senses exemplified by 'He's been carrying on with his wife's sister' and 'He stamped and swore and carried on something awful.'

se conduire. It is obvious that ‘demeanour’ and ‘conduct’ are fairly germane concepts. But, by association with the adjective *mean*, the verb *demean* has taken, in vulgar parlance, the idea of lowering oneself. I need hardly say that I use ‘vulgar’ in the etymological sense, for Mr. Churchill is here in the company of Richardson, Jane Austen, Thackeray, and Hawthorne. The mental process involved belongs to the region of folk-etymology. Similarly the verb *expunge*, to prick out, i.e. to indicate by dots that a word is to be regarded as deleted, is probably associated in many people’s minds with an obliterating ‘sponge’ and a clean slate.

A fervent ‘Left-winger’ recently demanded the immediate readmission of Russia¹ into the ‘comity of nations.’ He erred in good company, for serious historians now use the phrase as though it meant friendly association. *Comity*, derived from Lat. *comis*, courteous, is an old word for politeness and urbanity. The ‘comity of nations’ expresses something like international courtesies. Its current misuse is apparently due to erroneous association with *comes*, companion. Similarly, the ineradicable journalistic superstition that *protagonist*, the leading actor in a drama, is the opposite of *antagonist*, is inspired by a hazy recollection of the Latin *pro*.

¹ This ‘demand’ is supported (September 18, 1929) by the *Daily News*, which heads its leader ‘The “Pariah.”’ The erroneously exaggerated sense which Europeans attach to this word is due to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s ‘preposterous, though once popular tale, *La Chaumière indienne*, 1791’ (*Hobson-Jobson*).

Where a word has two meanings, it sometimes happens that the secondary meaning replaces the original in the popular mind. When we speak of 'getting to close quarters,' *close* has the derived sense of proximity, whereas 'close quarters' were originally the barricaded refuge in which the crew of a ship assailed by boarders could make a last stand, *close* having its primary sense of shut in, enclosed. In 'as plain as a pikestaff,' the adjective *plain* is taken in the sense of obvious, but it once referred to the smooth, unadorned appearance of a pikestaff, i.e. the long iron-shod staff of the wayfarer, as compared with the many carved and ornamented staffs of medieval officials. *Packstaff* was similarly used. The oldest meaning of *harness* is warlike equipment, armour. Ahab was killed by an archer, who 'drew a bow at a venture and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness' (2 *Chron.* xviii. 33). When we speak of 'dying in harness,' we think of Dobbin, toiling to the last, but for Macbeth the phrase had its original meaning of dead on the battle-field—'At least we'll die with harness on our back' (v. 5).

A favourite threat with the violent is that of 'beating to a mummy.' This naturally suggests the reduction of the victim to the extremely dead condition of those Egyptian princes and princesses whom modern lack of reverence has transformed into museum exhibits. This sense of *mummy* is not found before 1600. Two centuries earlier the name was applied to a medicinal preparation made from the unguents found in Egyptian tombs, and

hence to any pulpy or gelatinous substance. Mrs. Glasse, who did *not* write 'First catch your hare,' cautions cooks against boiling rice 'to a mummy.' So to 'beat to a mummy' means to reduce to pulp, to beat to a jelly.

For the fantastic transformation involved in 'heart of grace' see p. 72.

Both of the two most gentle elegies in our language contain simple traps. Those of us who 'did' *The Deserted Village* at school do not go wrong about 'passing rich with forty pounds a year,' for we know that *pass* is here used in its old sense of 'surpass' ('The peace of God that passeth all understanding') and that the adjectival form is colloquial for the adverbial, as in the 'surpassing clear and fine' which is coupled with 'exceeding rich and rare' in a famous old hymn. Thus 'passing rich' = exceedingly rich. Gray's delicate mosaic contains many earlier gems. 'Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife' was probably suggested by Drummond of Hawthornden's 'Far from the madding worldling's hoarse discords,' where *madding* = raving. The verb to *mad* was pretty well obsolete by Gray's time, but Wyclif makes Festus use it to St. Paul—'Festus with greet vois seyde, "Paul, thou maddist"' (*Acts* xxvi. 24).

Archaic language sometimes sets traps for the unwary. In my *Romance of Words* I have mentioned Scott's ghost-word *bartizan*, his misuse of *warison* (= garrison, protection) as though it were a kind of 'war-sound,' and his adoption of Spenser's

amazing *derring-do* howler; together with Chatterton's *slug-horn* (for *slogan*!). Spenser also uses an imaginary Middle English adjective *yond* in the sense of fierce, a blunder due to his misinterpretation of Chaucer's 'tygre yond (= yonder) in Inde.' Shakespeare describes the beetle as *shard-born*, i.e. born in dung¹—

' Ere to black Hecate's summons
The shardborn beetle with his drowsy hums
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note.'

(*Macbeth*, iii, 2)

The word long puzzled the commentators, most of them accepting Johnson's view that 'perhaps *shard* in Shakespeare may signify the sheaths of the wings of insects.' Hence poets have assumed a word *shard* in this mistaken sense, and Longfellow writes of 'the shining shards of beetles' (*Hiawatha*, xii, 182). Another Shakespearean word which has changed its meaning is *thews*. Properly used of habits, characteristics, etc., it acquired, by Shakespeare's time, the general sense of physique, what we sometimes call 'habit of body.' Scott evidently misunderstood it, and, by regularly coupling it with *sinews*, gave it the muscular sense which has now completely prevailed.

The meaning we attach to the word *scalp* is due to early association with the epithet 'hairy.' It was originally the crown of the head, the cranium. In a

¹ *Cow-shard*, *cow-sharn* are still used in dialect. The former is in Cotgrave as a gloss to *bouse de vache*. No connection with *shard*, fragment, as in *potsherd*.

Psalter of the 13th century it is used (vii. 16) where the *Authorized Version* and the *Prayer Book* both have *pate*, and Maundeville (c. 1400) has it in the sense of brain-pan. It is most familiar to us in the 'hairy scalp' (*Ps.* lxviii. 21) which both versions took over from Coverdale's translation, and perhaps this particular passage is responsible for its change of meaning.

Even misprints have had permanent results. One has resulted in the very useful word *syllabus* (p. 20). There is an astronomical verb *collimate*, which has something to do with adjusting the line of sight. It is derived from a supposed Latin verb *collimare*, which is really a misprint, in early editions of Cicero, for *collineare*, to bring into line. More familiar is *tweed*, a material made in Scotland. It was formerly *tweel*, the Scottish pronunciation of *twill*. Mrs. Dandie Dinmont promised Mr. Brown that his plaid should be made of 'as gude a tweel as ever came off a pirn'¹ (*Guy Mannering*, ch. xxvi). About the year 1830 this was misprinted *tweed* in some cloth-merchant's price-list, and, as the chief cloth-working region of Scotland lies along the river Tweed, the perversion was readily accepted as correct. *Conservancy* dates from a misprint in Johnson's *Dictionary* (p. 36).

The mistakes of the illiterate are often funny, but do not, as a rule, have permanent results. A very early example is *Whitsun*, which makes as much sense as *Whitmon* or *Whittues*! Under the

¹ Scottish for spool or reel.

influence of *Easter Day*, *Christmas Day*, etc., our ancestors converted *Whit* (i.e. white) *Sunday* into *Whitsun Day* and thus made a new word. Phrases adopted from foreign languages are especially apt to suffer. Our *curry favour* is a perversion of an earlier *curry favel*, for Old French *étriller Fauvel*, i.e. to groom the fallow horse, an allegorical figure of medieval legend. *Forlorn hope* is now often used as though *hope* were our familiar abstract noun. It is really for the military Dutch *verloren hoop*, lost detachment ('heap'), the leaders of a storming party. An ancient mistranslation is the historic *frankpledge*, by which the Normans rendered the Anglo-Saxon *frith-borh*, peace-pledge, which they understood to mean free pledge. A later example is to 'call a spade a spade,' the sinner in this case being the great Erasmus, translating Plutarch.¹ More recent still is the illogical to 'put a spoke in one's wheel' in the sense of hindering. This is a mistranslation, due to the natural affinity between 'spokes' and 'wheels,' of Dutch 'een spaak en het wiel steeken,' where *spaak* means staff, bar; cf. French 'mettre des bâtons dans les roues.'

Generally speaking, excursions into a language with which the writer is unfamiliar are fraught with peril. Not everyone who uses *beau idéal* is aware that *beau* is the noun and *idéal* the adjective. Certainly not the well-known journalist who, mindful of early French lessons, recently improved it into *bel idéal*! *Cui bono* is commonly used as equivalent

¹ See my *More Words Ancient and Modern*, p. 119.

to ‘ to what purpose ? ’ But, for Lucius Cassius, to whom Cicero attributes the saying, it was an unfailing test of motive—*Cui bono fuisset* ? Who would have profited by it ? Our noisiest eugenicist, hymning in the *Observer* (October 24, 1924) the joys of Prohibition, regretted the impossibility of giving *in petto* a proper description of its working. The Italian *in petto*, in the breast—i.e. tacitly, secretly—hardly expresses the writer’s meaning.

Chaucer and other Middle English writers often use the Old French title *dan*, the masculine of *dame*, speaking, for instance, of ‘ Dan Cupid ’ and of ‘ Dan Russell the fox.’ That Spenser should apply the same title to ‘ Dan Chaucer, well of English undefyled ’ (*Faerie Queene*, IV, ii, 32), is right and natural, but the author who, on the strength of this, wrote of ‘ good old Daniel Chaucer ’ really went a little too far.

Our Shakespearean reminiscences are not always free from misunderstanding. I am not alluding to chronic misquotation, for the psychology of language seems to require that only by becoming a misquotation can a quotation obtain real currency. Most of us say, ‘ The Devil can quote Scripture for his purpose,’ ‘ A young man married is a young man marred,’ ‘ A beggarly array of empty benches,’ ‘ Screw your courage to the sticking-point,’ ‘ Discretion is the better part of valour,’ and so forth, with the confident feeling that we are quoting Shakespeare’s own words. But that is another story ; for here we are dealing with the misunder-

stood and not with the misquoted. No Shakespearean phrase is more often misused than 'foregone conclusion,' descriptive of a result that can be predicted with absolute certainty, whereas Othello meant by it a disaster that has already occurred. Nor do we generally use 'seamy side' in quite the sense which it has in the same play—

' Some such squire he was
That turn'd your wit the seamy side without,
And made you to suspect me with the Moor.'
(iv, 2)

Bellenden, in his translation of Hector Boece's *Scotorum Historiae*, wrote, 'Macbeth and Banquho met by ye gait thre women clothit in elrage and uncouth weid. They wer jugit be the pepill to be weird sisters'; and two centuries earlier Chaucer told of the 'wirdes that we clepen destinee.' We still use 'weird' in its proper sense in the phrase 'to dree one's weird'—that is, to endure one's fate. Bellenden's 'weird sisters' were borrowed by Shakespeare, and the regular collocation of the words resulted in the birth of an adjective 'weird,' taken to mean grisly, fantastic, and so forth. With this transformation of a noun into an adjective, cf. *game* (p. 77).

The modern misuse of some expressions is due less to misapprehension than to the innate vulgarity of mankind. 'Patience on a monument,' from Viola's pretty speech in *Twelfth Night*, suggests to the modern mind only a look of bored resignation, while 'single blessedness,' used by Shakespeare of

the holiness of celibate life, helps to express our half-ironical, half-complacent conception of the bachelor's care-free existence. 'Not wisely, but too well' occurs in one of the most tragic speeches in literature, but is now often used in reference to one whose dinner has been accompanied by copious libations. So, also, the 'aching void' which we owe to Cowper's *Walking with God* is commonly applied to the feeling that warns us that the next meal is overdue, and 'latter end,' once poetically associated with man's destiny in old age and eternity, has become almost exclusively anatomical.

Nautical metaphor has many pitfalls for the landlubber. Cheese-paring economy is sometimes described as 'spoiling the ship for a ha'porth of tar.' But Captain John Smith, the amazing John Smith of Virginia, speaks with derision of those who would rather 'lose ten sheepe than be at the charge of a halfe penny worth of tarre.' In many English dialects *sheep* is regularly pronounced *ship*, and the *Ship Street* of our country towns represents an earlier Sheep Street, leading generally to the sheep-market. Tar is a very ancient medicine for some diseases of sheep. When the preliminary difficulties of a problem are cleared away, we say, 'Now all is plain sailing.' But the sailor speaks of *plane-sailing*, and, though *plain* and *plane* are really the same word, the allusion is not to simplicity, but to navigation by a plane chart—that is, one drawn on the theoretical assumption that the earth's surface is plane and not spherical. During the World War, the

type of man who in France had the name *jusqu'au-boutiste* was sometimes in England called a *bitter-ender*, as being determined to see things through 'to the bitter end.' If we again consult Captain John Smith, we find that the *bitter* is the 'turn of a cable about the bitts,' and that to pay out cable or rope 'to the bitter end' is to let it run out till none remains inboard. Mistaken association with the adjective *bitter* has given a sort of stern vigour to the metaphorical application of the phrase.

Two other nautical expressions are commonly misunderstood. I find in my morning paper that an individual carrying a large bag 'bolted,' when a policeman approached to question him—'A stern chase ensued, but the man escaped.' The proper meaning of a 'stern chase' is one in which the pursuing vessel follows directly 'astern' of the pursued. In 'sheer hulk,' made familiar by Dibdin's famous song, 'Here a sheer hulk lies poor Tom Bowling,' *sheer* is commonly taken to be an adjective. A kind of crane used in shipyards is called the *shears*, the two straddling poles which compose it suggesting a pair of scissors. The apparatus used to be set up on an old dismasted ship, properly called a 'shear hulk.' Warships no longer fit for service were adapted to this purpose, hence the comparison with the sailor permanently out of action.

Our two great repertories of poetic and forceful phraseology are Shakespeare and the Bible. To the instances already given of our misuse of Shakespearean expressions may be added a few from the

Authorized Version. The absurd *helpmeet* is due to a wrong hyphen in *Genesis* ii. 18—‘An help meet [i.e. suitable] for him.’ In quite recent years it has become fashionable to define agreement as ‘seeing eye to eye with.’ This is a reminiscence of *Isaiah* lii. 8—‘They shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.’ One would need to be a Hebrew scholar to say exactly what it means, but the humblest layman can see what it does not mean. Another (to me) obscure passage occurs in *Habakkuk* ii. 2—‘Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.’ We have shifted the position of the word *may* and, since the 17th century, have used the phrase in reference to that which is so clear that it can be understood without a pause—

‘But truths on which depends our main concern,
That ’tis our shame and misery not to learn,
Shine by the side of every path we tread
With such a lustre he that runs may read.’
(Cowper, *Tirocinium*)

The only occurrence in the *Authorized Version* of the word *strain* is the famous ‘strain at a gnat and swallow a camel’ (*St. Matthew* xxiii. 24), in which *strain* would appear to have the sense of making an effort or, at least, a fuss. But the Greek verb is *diulizein*, to strain through a sieve or filter, and the *Revised Version* has gone back to Tyndale’s rendering of 1526, ‘Blind guides, which strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.’

The complication of motives which we now

associate with 'wheels within wheels' has little warrant in Ezekiel's description of his vision—'And their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel' (i. 16). 'Oh that mine adversary had written a book!' (*Job xxxi. 35*) is sometimes quoted by the polemist eager to get to grips with his foe. These words are altogether misused, if we accept the emendation of the *Revised Version*, 'Oh that I had the indictment which mine adversary hath written!' Which brings us to the question of original errors in the *Authorized Version*.

The *Revised Version* of the English Bible, published in 1884, shows that some of the most picturesque expressions in the language rest upon mis-translations. There can hardly be a phrase more full of awful boding than 'the valley of the shadow of death,' one of the many jewels which the *Authorized Version* inherited from Coverdale. It is true that the *Revised Version* preserves this reading, but the marginal note gives the alternative, and probably more correct, 'valley of deep darkness.' The early vernacular translations were based on the *Vulgate* and the *Septuagint*, both of which often misinterpret the Hebrew pointing. Thus *ferrum pertransiit animam ejus* was poetically rendered in the *Prayer Book* version of the *Psalms*, 'the iron entered into his soul.' This is also the reading of the *Great Bible* (1539), while the *Authorized Version* and the *Revised Version* have the more prosaic 'he was laid in (chains of) iron,' which represents the Hebrew original, instead of the erroneous *Vulgate*. *Scape-*

goat¹ was coined by Tyndale as a translation of the *caper emissarius* of the *Vulgate* (*Lev.* xvi. 8), now regarded as a mistranslation of the Hebrew original. The *Revised Version* replaces this by the proper name 'Azazel,' with the alternative rendering 'dismissal.' When one thinks of the absolute impossibility of expressing in any other way the idea contained in the picturesque *scapegoat*, one is thankful that early textual interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures was sometimes uncertain.

¹ Cf. French *bouc émissaire* and German *sündenbock*. The latter is comparatively modern, apparently coined by Campe early in the 19th century. Luther has *der ledige bock*, adopted by Coverdale as *free goat*.

CHAPTER XII

WORD-MAKERS

'Ex nihilo nihil fit' is as true in the world of words as in the physical universe. New words come into existence every year, sometimes deliberately coined to express new ideas or to describe mechanical inventions and mercantile products, sometimes springing all-armed from some anonymous brain in a form which defies any attempts at etymological explanation. But, whether scientific or slangy, each word has an origin. Its creator has consciously or unconsciously had other words at the back of his mind or has instinctively chosen sounds which, though apparently meaningless, have had for him a subtle suggestion of the image or notion to be expressed. Of such mysterious phenomena as *blimp* and *flivver*, *blurb* and *oojah*, we may say what Locke says of the 17th-century novelty *banter*, 'He that first brought the word in use put together, as he thought fit, those ideas he made it stand for.'

If the maker of a new word is a distinguished figure in history or literature, the record of its first appearance is usually easy to establish, but, as Bradley says, 'We shall never know anything about the myriads of obscure persons who have contributed to the development of the English tongue' (*The Making of English*, p. 215). Anecdotic etymology is always

to be distrusted. The word *schooner* (earlier *scooner*) is said to have originated at Gloucester (Massachusetts) about 1713. There is a legend that, when the vessel took the water, a bystander exclaimed, 'See how she scoons' (i.e. skims over the water), to which the shipbuilder replied, 'A scooner let her be.' This is first recorded in 1790 and, though constantly repeated in 'etymological' dictionaries, is probably a pure invention.¹ *Teetotal*, an intensification of *total*, is commonly attributed to Dicky Turner of Preston, a working-man temperance orator, who, in a speech made in September 1833, declared for 'teetotal abstinence.' The story is said to be recorded on his tombstone. If we turn to the *Oxford Dictionary*, we find that Judge James Hall, writing in 1832, records the opinion of a backwoodsman to the effect that 'These Mingoos ought to be essentially and particularly and teetotally obflisticated off of the face of the whole yearth.' So, if Dicky Turner originated 'teetotal abstinence,' he did not invent the adjective.

The deliberate coinage of new words can be traced very far back. Examples can even be found in Greek—e.g. *cosmopolites*, citizen of the world, is attributed to Diogenes, and *philosophos* is due to the modesty of Pythagoras, who, reluctant to assume the title *sophos*, sage, described himself as a 'lover of wisdom.' The great Latin word-maker was Cicero, using 'word-maker' in the sense of one who constructs something new from existing material. He

¹ See E. P. Morris, *The Fore-and-Aft Rig in America*.

found that his language, with its limited supply of strong and clear ideas, was deficient in philosophical terms, so, on the model of Greek *ēthikos*, from *ēthē*, customs, he coined *moralis*, from the synonymous Latin *mores*. From *qualis*, of what kind, he formed *qualitas* as a companion, word to the already existing *quantitas*. Greek *apatheia*, freedom from pain, he rendered by *indolentia*. The modern English sense of *indolence*, which dates only from the 18th century, suggests that pain and work are, to the modern mind, almost synonymous. Not all of Cicero's coinages were successful. His *mulierositas* found as little favour with his fellow-citizens as *mulierosity* did with the landlady of the Tête d'Or (*The Cloister and the Hearth*, ch. xxxiii), and his *beatitudo* he only used once, though apparently it was revived by the early Fathers. It was probably Seneca who, as a rendering of Greek *ousia*, coined the very useful *essentia* from the fictitious present participle (*essens*, *essent*-) of *esse*, to be. Late Latin evolved another present participle *ens*, *ent*-, whence *entitas* and the *entity* of the philosophers.

The early Fathers of the Church made very free with Latin, and theology still keeps many of their neologisms. I will only mention St. Augustine's two chief contributions to language, viz. *Deitas*, which he coined from *Deus*, god, on the model of *divinitas*, and *soliloquium*, which was probably suggested to him by the Greek *monologos*, speaking alone. It is a far cry, in more ways than one, from St. Augustine to Huxley, who, in 1869, at a meeting of the Metaphysical Society, put forward the word

agnostic, which he took from the 'unknown god,' Greek *agnōstos theos*, of *Acts* xvii. 23. Huxley was a very busy word-maker, but his other contributions, such as *abiogenesis*, *melanochroi*, etc., are rather of the nature of algebraical expressions put together in the service of concise biological description.

There must have been a good deal of word-making done between Augustine and the Renaissance, but it is anonymous. The sudden expansion of the world about the year 1500, due to the Renaissance, the Reformation, the invention of printing, and the geographical discoveries, necessitated an expansion of vocabulary. The early translators of the Bible, Tyndale and Coverdale, did not, of course, make new words, but, in rendering Greek compounds, they introduced many English compounds which, preserved in the *Authorized Version*, have become an integral part of the language. Tyndale originated *long-suffering*, *broken-hearted*, *stumbling-block*, *scape-goat* (see p. 199), *mercy-seat*, *shewbread*, etc., the last two modelled on Luther's *gnadenstuhl* and *schaubrot*. Coverdale gave us *lovingkindness*, *blood-guiltiness*, *kindhearted*, etc. It is, of course, possible that some of these compounds were already in popular use, but their literary currency dates from the two great Tudor translations.

The same applies to the Elizabethan giants. We know that Spenser invented *blatant* and *braggadocio*, probably also *elfin*, but we can hardly be sure that he was the first to call morn *rosy-fingered*.¹ The first

¹ Suggested by Horner's *rhododactylos*.

Oxford Dictionary record of *bloodstained* is from Shakespeare (1 *Henry IV*, i, 3). It is hardly to be supposed that so natural an epithet should not already have been current English, though some of his more imaginative compounds, such as *proud-pied* (April), *lack-lustre* (eye), *heaven-kissing* (hill), *cloud-capped* (towers), *fancy-free*, seem to bear the unmistakable stamp of the greatest of all word-masters.

Of Shakespeare's contribution to our vocabulary it is difficult to say anything definite. The subject is too vast and there is nothing even distantly approaching it in the history of language. Anyone who had the patience to work through the *Oxford Dictionary*, and make a list of the words either first recorded in Shakespeare's works or used by him in a new sense, would be staggered at the result. We have two valuable Shakespeare dictionaries or concordances, viz. Schmidt's *Shakespeare-Lexicon* and Dr. Onions's *Shakespeare Glossary*, but there is no book giving a comprehensive description and analysis of Shakespeare's language. It is good news that Mr. George Gordon is writing one. In the meantime his Tract (No. XXIX of the Society for Pure English) gives much interesting information. Among familiar words which, as far as is known, are first found in Shakespeare's works may be mentioned *aerial*, *bump*, *countless*, *dwindle*, *eventful*, *fitful*, *gnarled*, *hurry*, *ill-starred*, *lonely*, *monumental*, etc. etc. How far these words, and hundreds more that could be enumerated, are to be regarded as of the poet's own coinage is an open question. Still

more bewildering is his contribution to our familiar phraseology, with which, however, we are not here concerned. I will mention only his to 'out-Herod Herod' (*Hamlet*, iii, 2), i.e. to exaggerate the rôle of a stage tyrant, on which endless variations have been played by the moderns, e.g. Samuel Butler talks of 'out-Oliphanting Mrs. Oliphant.' It is Shakespeare also who, Mr. Gordon tells us, is 'our first literary authority to call a vehicle a *conveyance*, a ship's crew a *company*, anything that happens an *event*, and a road a *road*.'¹ These are, of course, examples of transferred meaning, not of word-making.

After Milton, who coined *pandemonium* and *moon-struck*, and gave *gloom* a new meaning, the poets seemed to think the instrument was perfect, as indeed, for poetic purposes, it was. Here and there we find a new epithet which has become familiar, e.g. Gay's *dew-besprinkled* (for Milton's *dew-besprent*, *Comus*, 540), Gray's *ivy-mantled*, Shelley's *sunlit*, Tennyson's *moonlit*. It is surprising to find that we had to wait till Tennyson came for *moonlit*, but it is positively astounding that he should be apparently the earliest authority for *fairy-tale*. Two effective compounds due to Scott² are *free-lance* and *red-handed*, both of which have a deceptive medieval flavour.

¹ The earlier sense was an *inroad* (Scottish *raid* is identical with *road*) or a *roadstead*, e.g. *Yarmouth Roads*.

² Someone should write a book on the debt of our language to Scott, an author who, according to a contemporary manufacturer of shockers, is 'unreadable.'

The large new vocabulary created for the needs of theology, philosophy, social science, etc., is mostly the work of the Latinizers of the 17th and 18th centuries. Words belonging to this class are, as a rule, simply Latin words to which a more or less English form has been given. Sir Thomas Browne was the first to use *precarious*, *hallucination*, and perhaps hundreds of similar words, but he accomplished a genuine formation with *antediluvian*. A still more prolific word-maker was his forgotten contemporary Henry More, who introduced *central*, *fortuitous*, and many other adjectives which the language has absorbed without discomfort. Dryden joined a Greek ending to an Anglo-Saxon stem when, on the model of *criticism*, he coined *witticism*, 'if you will pardon a new word.' Evelyn, who was responsible for introducing a number of Latin words via Italian, was well inspired when he coined the English *outline*.

The word-making of the later 18th century was very largely concerned with politics and with what is now called *Sociology*, the latter for French *sociologie*, coined by Auguste Comte. The two great word-makers were Burke († 1797) and Bentham († 1832). To Burke we owe *colonial*, *electioneer*, *municipality*, etc.; to Bentham, *exhaustive*, *international*, *minimize*, *utilitarian*, etc. Coleridge continues with *pessimism* and *phenomenal*, Macaulay with *constituency* and *influential*. Among comparatively recent coinages which have been unusually successful may be mentioned Huxley's *agnostic* (p. 203), Galton's *eugenics*, and Mr. Shaw's *superman*. From French we have borrowed *bureaucracy*, coined by the econo-

mist Gournay († 1759), and *altruism*, introduced by Comte († 1857) to express the opposite of *egoism*. The latter, French *égoïsme*, seems to have come from the Jansenists of Port-Royal in the 17th century. Another communal creation is *optimism*, introduced, in 1737, by the Jesuit authors of the *Mémoires de Trévoux*. The European vogue of the word was due to Voltaire's *Candide ou l'Optimisme* (1759). When Carlyle used *environment* as a pedantic rendering of German *umgebung*, he perhaps thought he was making a new word, but it occurs in Holland's *Plutarch* (1605). *Hypnotism* was coined by Dr. James Braid in 1832, but the adjective *hypnotic* is of long standing. The last two words bring us near the boundary of the scientific domain, the most dreary region in word-history.

The most prolific word-maker of the modern period is undoubtedly the *scientist*, to use a term suggested in 1840 by Whewell 'to describe a cultivator of science in general.' The bulk of this vocabulary, which grows almost every day, is too specialized to make much appeal to the man in the street. There are, of course, scientific words which pass into general use, e.g. everybody understands *protoplasm*. No doubt Hugo von Mohl, the botanist who introduced the word in 1846, thought it quite new. It is, however, used, but in a different sense, by Venantius Fortunatus, a Latin poet of the 6th century. It is a sound instinct that sends the scientist to Greek for his material. Native words have already their fixed meanings and the Latin vocabulary is so

completely absorbed into the European languages that it is difficult to build up new words from it without risk of ambiguity. When the modern era in word-building began, Greek was, except for its early contribution to the theological and philosophical vocabulary, unused material, and, at the same time, generally intelligible to the educated. Its use in scientific nomenclature supplies a kind of international language, and it is regrettable that a mistaken parochialism should have induced the Germans to create their own vocabulary from native material, e.g. to replace *hydrogène* (de Morveau, 1787) and *oxygène* (Lavoisier, 1875) by *wasserstoff* and *sauerstoff*.

Before the chemists came the alchemists, and one of the most famous of the latter ranks among the great word-makers of the world. Moreover, in many cases, we have no idea where he got his words. Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus von Hohenheim, sometimes called Bombastus by his contemporaries, was a Swiss chemist and physician who lived from 1493 to 1541. After the fashion of the day he adopted a fantastic 'latinization' of his name, and, as *Paracelsus* (*celsus* = lofty), he is notorious as the greatest adept¹ of the Renaissance. One of his elixirs he called *laudanum*. As it probably consisted chiefly of 'dope,' it is now used for an opiate. More startling in form, but less familiar, is his *opodeldoc* plaster, while his *nostoc* has been accepted by modern botanists as the name for a

¹ This is the oldest meaning of the word, Latin *adeptus*, one who has attained (the secrets of the universe).

genus of algae. Holding the old belief as to the four elements—earth, air, fire, and water—he invented names for their invisible inhabitants. *Salamander* he took from Greek and he coined *undine* from Latin *unda*, wave; but though many conjectures have been made, probably no one will ever know for certain whence he got *gnome* and *sylph*, now so familiar that it is difficult to think of them as artificial words.

Next come two great scientific names almost contemporary with each other, the Italian Galileo († 1642) and the Fleming Van Helmont († 1644). Galileo did not himself invent the name *telescopium* for the instrument which he at first called *perspicillum*. According to contemporary evidence *telescopium* was suggested by Prince Cesi, president of the Roman Accademia dei Lincei. Here we may settle the other *tele-* words. *Telephone* was in use before the invention of the modern instrument and was probably coined, about 1834, by the French physicist Sudré. It was also a Frenchman, Chappe, who, in 1792, applied the name *télégraphe* to a signalling instrument of the semaphore type, which he at first thought of calling a *tachygraphe*. The latest of the family is *television*, a horrible hybrid whose originator wisely remains anonymous. To Van Helmont we owe *gas*, the most widely used of all artificial words. We have his own statement that he had the Greek *chaos* vaguely present to his mind, the initial sound of this word being fairly represented by a Dutch *g*. He also produced *blas*, which perished in infancy. With the unequal fate of these two words

we may compare that of *telepathy* and *telaesthesia*, both coined by Myers, in 1882, the one now familiar English, the other limited to psychic circles. Napier of Merchiston's *logarithm* (1644) is, like *gas*, an almost international word.

Newton, who was born in the year of Galileo's death, usually wrote in Latin, to which language he contributed the new words *centrifugus* and *centripetus*. Long before this (in 1621) Gassendi had hit upon *aurora borealis*. Newton's contemporary, Robert Boyle, is credited with *corpuscle*. He also made *pendulum* a familiar word.

Perhaps the busiest of all word-makers was the Swedish botanist known in this country as Linnaeus († 1778), who laid the foundations of modern biological nomenclature. The name of *Flora*, the Roman goddess of flowers, was used in the titles of botanical treatises of the 17th century. Linnaeus revived the name in the now accepted sense and supplied it with a companion *Fauna*, supposed to be the sister of the rural divinity Faunus, identified with Pan.

Linnaeus showed great ingenuity in coining scientific names, and, though much of his terminology is known only to the botanist or zoologist, some of his words have become quite familiar. He named the *camellia* from Kamel, a Jesuit who had described the vegetation of the Philippines, the *zinnia* from Zinn, a German botanist. Sometimes he is prosaic, as in *azalea*, which is simply Greek for 'dry,' sometimes fanciful, e.g. the *tropaeolum*,

little trophy, suggested to him a shield (the leaf) and helmet (the flower). A very humble person is commemorated in *quassia*, named by Linnaeus from Graman Quasi (great man Quasi !), a Surinam negro who discovered the medicinal qualities of the plant. To Linnaeus also we owe *aphis*, the plant-louse, apparently a 'back-formation' from Greek *apheidés*, unsparing.

The formation of plant-names from personal names is a recognized practice and the list is being continually lengthened. Such names are usually given by way of compliment,¹ e.g. Humboldt, the great German traveller, named the *dahlia* from Dahl, a Swedish botanist. *Begonia* is from Michel Begon, French governor of San Domingo (17th century), *fuchsia* from the 16th-century German botanist Fuchs, *lobelia* from Matthias de Lobel, physician to James I, *magnolia* from Pierre Magnol († 1715), professor of botany at Montpellier, *gardenia* from Dr. A. Garden, vice-president of the Royal Society († 1791), *montbretia* from C. de Montbret, a French botanist († 1801), and so *ad infinitum*. Some of these names, e.g. *camellia*, *dahlia*, have become so familiar that their artificial origin is hardly realized ; but *clarkia* !

The old connection between the alchemist and the astrologer persists in the number of elements named

¹ Electricians follow the same practice. *Volt(a)*, *Amp(ère)*, *Farad(ay)*, and *Ohm* were all famous physicists. It was Faraday who introduced the electrical *ion*, the present participle neuter of Greek *ienai*, to go.

in modern times from the stars and planets. *Uranium* was named in 1789 by Klaproth as a compliment to Herschel, who had discovered a new planet in 1781 and called it *Uranus* (i.e. heaven) after the father of Saturn. In 1798 Klaproth discovered another element to which he gave the name *tellurium* (Latin *tellus*, earth) as a companion to *uranium*. Berzelius followed in 1818 with *selenium*, from Greek *selenē*, moon, to which Ramsay added in 1895 *helium* from *hēlios*, sun. More recent coinages tend to depart from the classical tradition. *Polonium*, discovered in 1898 by the Curies, is a tribute to Madame Curie's Polish nationality. *Hafnium*, first isolated by a Danish chemist in 1923, is from the second half of *Kjbenhavn* (Copenhagen). This is all very sad, but, after all, these things are not really words. More generally familiar is *dynamite*, coined (1866) by Alfred Nobel, of the Nobel prize, from Greek *dynamis*, power, in imitation of which we have the French *turpinite*, from the name of its inventor. This explosive was tested (c. 1888) at Lydd, in Kent, hence *lyddite*.

Animals offer less opportunity to the scientific nomenclator. Any new creature discovered in the wilds is usually allowed to keep its native name, but the scientist has free play with the antediluvians. The *dinosaur*, terrible lizard, which so obligingly laid its eggs in the preservative sand of the Gobi desert, is one of Owen's numerous coinages. *Mastodon* is adapted from Cuvier's French description *mastodonte*, nipple-tooth. For a supposed intermediate between man and monkey, the 'missing

link,' Haeckel invented in 1868 the description *pithecanthrope*, ape-man. 'Missing link' appears to have been introduced by Lyell, who used it of gaps in geological history. He also manufactured between 1830 and 1840 a set of words in *-cene* (Greek *kainos*, new) to describe the geological ages (*eocene*, *pleistocene*, etc.). *Palaeolithic*, old stone, and *neolithic*, new stone, were coined by Lubbock, afterwards Lord Avebury. Most of these, and Adam Sedgwick's *palaeozoic*, old life (1837), are generally understood, and the convenience of such nomenclature for international currency is evident.

The progress of medical science is responsible for a fair crop of made words. *Vaccine* (1799) is due to Jenner's use of *variolae vaccinae* as a description of cow-pox. About 1800 Hahnemann introduced *homoeopathy*, same feeling, and *allopathy*, other feeling, by analogy with which Preissnitz coined, in 1825, *hydrotherapy*, in a sense which would be properly expressed by *hydrotherapy*. *Anaesthetic* appears to have been first used in 1847 by Simpson, the apostle of chloroform, *aesthetic* having been adopted about 1750 by Baumgarten with the erroneous meaning which has persisted. A very recent novelty is Dr. Banting's *insulin* (1922), from the 'insulated' appearance of the gland from which the remedy is obtained. His adoption of a Latin word is rather a new departure. Perhaps he felt that Greek was being overdone. With the rather elaborate *heliotherapy*, for sun-cure, may be com-

pared a contemporary tradesman's *xylopyrography* for poker-work!¹

The man of science would be well advised to consult occasionally the man of words.² Many familiar and generally accepted scientific terms are very unscientifically constructed. Examples are Reichenbach's *creosote*, flesh-preserving, and *paraffin* (Latin *parum affinis*, little related, from its lack of affinity with other substances), Sédillot's *microbe* (Greek *mikros bios*, little life), and Selmi's *ptomaine* (from Greek *ptoma*, corpse). The last is described by the *Oxford Dictionary* as 'blunderingly formed,' while its usual pronunciation is 'illiterate.' *Cyclone*, the invention of the old sea-captain Henry Piddington, in his *Sailor's Hornbook* (1848), was perhaps meant for *cyclome*. *Melanesian*, modelled on *Polynesian*, to mean 'black islander,' would rather mean 'inhabitant of a black island.' Perhaps the most idiotic coinage of this type is *philately*, French *philatélie*, perpetrated in 1846, from Greek *atelos*, free of charge, by a stamp-collector named Herpin.

Playing with unfamiliar languages is always risky. The game called *diabolo* was apparently named by someone who confused the Spanish *diablo* with the Italian *diavolo*. Linguistically it belongs to the same class as the 'French' *équestrienne* of the

¹ Pedantic though this is, I prefer it to the *slumber-wear* now extensively advertised in the District trains. This euphemism for 'nighties' and pyjamas is understood to be Transatlantic.

² The man of words is not himself a great word-maker, but he has made a few useful contributions, e.g. we owe *aphetic* to Sir James Murray, *semantic* to Michel Bréal, *ablaut* to Jakob Grimm, and *umlaut* to Klopstock.

showman. It was a showman also who was responsible for *phantasmagoria*, an optical illusion exhibited in London in 1802. The *Oxford Dictionary* regards this 'mouth-filling and startling term' as the showman's own product, but it was adapted from the rather earlier French *fantasmagorie*.

The inventor of a new device is usually much concerned to find a good name for his offspring. I do not know who first suggested *aeronaut* and *aerostat*, the latter applied to the first balloons, but, as early as 1785, the aeronaut Blanchard named his safety device a *parachute*, ward off fall, apparently on the model of *parapluie*, which it also resembles in shape. Brewster invented and named the *kaleidoscope* in 1817, Wheatstone the *stereoscope* in 1838. *Photograph* was suggested by Herschel in 1839 as a compromise between the rival terms *photogene* and *heliograph*, the latter of which has survived in a different sense. *Phonograph* had been in use for many years before it was applied to Edison's device, while *gramophone*, coined by Berliner in 1888, is an awful example of what an inventor can do when he is let loose among words. The brothers Lumière invented and named the *cinématographe* in 1896. Its English form would have been *kinema*-.

A certain number of 'nonsense' words have been admitted into our very hospitable language. Swift made up some curious words in *Gulliver's Travels*. Of these *lilliputian* is still in general use, and Disraeli, in his impetuous youth, addressed Daniel

O'Connell as a *yahoo*. From the echoic *tweedle*, imitative of the sound of a musical instrument, John Byrom coined *tweedle-dum* and *tweedle-dee*, in his famous lines (1725) on the quarrel between Handel and Bononcini—

'Strange all this difference should be
'Twixt Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee!'

Panjandrum comes from the rigmarole extemporized by Foote (1775) to test the memory of the old actor Macklin. In our own day several of Lewis Carroll's weird coinages have obtained a limited circulation, and one of them, *chortle*, has full currency. *Spoof* is the invention of Mr. Arthur Roberts, the comedian, who thus has the unusual experience of seeing his contribution accepted by the language during his own lifetime.

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